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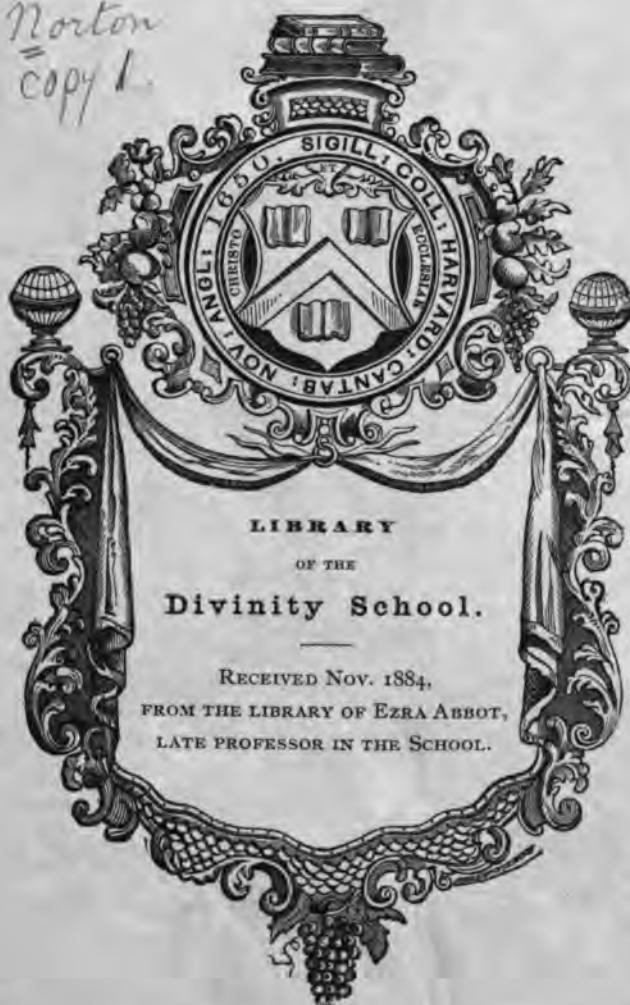
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INTERNAL EVIDENCES

OF THE

GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPELS.

PART I.

REMARKS ON CHRISTIANITY AND THE GOSPELS,
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO
STRAUSS'S "LIFE OF JESUS."

PART II.

PORTIONS OF AN UNFINISHED WORK.

By ANDREWS NORTON.



BOSTON:
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1855.

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EDITORIAL NOTE.

THE work which forms the First Part of this volume was mostly written in the years 1847 and 1848, and, after its completion, was laid aside for future revision. In 1849 a severe attack of illness left the strength of its author so diminished, that, for a considerable period, his pursuits were interrupted, and when he again became able to work he devoted himself, in the near prospect of the end of life, to more important labors than that of revising what he had written. At the time of his death, in 1853, the work was in the state in which it now appears; but the manuscript bore many notes in pencil upon passages which it had been in the mind of the author to alter or enlarge. It was his wish, however, that the work should be published; for whatever changes or additions he might have made would have been only for the purpose of enforcing, with still greater dis-

tinctness and earnestness, the sentiments and the convictions already expressed.

The Second Part of the volume consists of what, at the time of its composition, many years ago, was intended to form a portion of a general treatise on the internal evidences of the genuineness of the Gospels. This work was never finished.

The Appendix consists of one of the Lectures delivered by the author as Dexter Lecturer in Harvard University. It has been printed here as having a close relation to the subject of the volume.

It may be remarked, that many of the internal proofs of the genuineness of the Gospels are pointed out and illustrated in the Notes accompanying the author's Translation of the Gospels.

The few editorial notes are inclosed in brackets. Whatever is so inclosed is editorial, except where the brackets are used in the course of quotations.

CAMBRIDGE, February, 1855.

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P A R T I.

R E M A R K S

ON

CHRISTIANITY AND THE GOSPELS,

WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO

STRAUSS'S "LIFE OF JESUS."

INTRODUCTION.

It has been my intention, after completing what I had to say respecting the historical evidence of the genuineness of the Gospels, to present a view of the collateral, or of what, by giving an allowable, though somewhat extended, meaning to the term, may be called the internal evidence of their genuineness. It may seem at first thought as if this might be sufficiently done by a direct statement of the topics which compose that evidence, without adverting to the objections, founded on the contents of the Gospels, and originating, as I conceive, in erroneous conceptions of their character, with which their genuineness and authenticity have been assailed. But such is not the fact.

It may be true,—I believe it to be true,—that, without bringing into notice the false conceptions of believers, or the objections of unbelievers, an argument may be framed for the authenticity of

the Gospels, derived from the internal evidence afforded by them, which to an intelligent man may appear conclusive, as admitting of no direct reply. Yet to an intelligent man it may be far from being satisfactory. In all cases of moral reasoning where any doubt may exist, in all cases where there is a division of opinion, and men who have professedly examined the question at issue have arrived at opposite conclusions, we desire to view the subject in all its aspects, and are unwilling definitely to settle our judgment till we have heard both sides. Even the very circumstance that an argument appears to us decisive may increase our desire to know how it has been evaded, or what other reasoning has been opposed to it. Respecting any important subject, we wish not merely to attain a conviction of the truth, but also to comprehend the bearing of the truth on the whole system of opinions having relation to it, either as directly contradicting it, on the one hand, or, on the other, as disguising it and keeping it out of sight by misrepresentations and false substitutes. We do not care to have the sun admitted to us through an opening into a darkened room. We desire to see the objects exhibited by it in broad daylight.

In treating of the historical evidence for the

genuineness of the Gospels, I have endeavored to bring distinctly into view what has been asserted or suggested in opposition to it. This it was easy to do in the course of the discussion, without any preliminary argument. But in regard to the subject before us the case is different. In treating the historical evidence there can be no essential disagreement, among men capable of discussing the subject, concerning the principles of reasoning to be applied to it. The only controversy must be about facts. But he who opposes the credit of the Gospels on the ground of their intrinsic character may proceed throughout on false principles and untenable theories. He is then not to be met in the course of the discussion by particular confutations of particular objections, but by a previous general confutation of the whole tenor of his reasoning. And this becomes necessary in order to attain a clear and satisfactory comprehension of the subject.

THESE considerations have led me to take particular notice of the late attacks of the infidel theologians of Germany on the credibility of the Gospels. Such a mode of pursuing the inquiry is particularly demanded at the present day, for the

writings of those theologians have obtained a wide notoriety, and have affected the minds of numbers by whom they are read, and of numbers by whom they are not read. Through the operation of this cause, and of others of a more general nature, whose working lies deeper, Christianity has with very many ceased to be regarded as a subject of rational and manly investigation. The truth is a sad one, but it is the truth, that a very great portion even of intelligent men pass it by, perhaps with a certain air of respect, but as if it were a matter about which they have no particular concern ; — as if it were not their business to determine for themselves what is true and what is false concerning it. They appear to look on the whole subject as one to be left to divines and priests and the Church. Gross ignorance and gross misconceptions of Christianity consequently prevail. Objections, cavils, and supposed difficulties, which would at once vanish in clear day, assume a portentous appearance amid the darkness, or the perplexity of false lights. Explanation, thorough explanation, a readiness to view the subject on every side and in all its important relations, a total indisposition to fall back for support on authority or traditional opinions or vulgar prejudices, and a freedom from all those

motives of fear or interest which may bias the mind to countenance the errors of any party, are especial requisites at the present day in a defender and expositor of Christianity. He should be

*“ veritatem quærere pertinax,
..... sollicitus parum
Utcunque stet commune vulgi
Arbitrium et popularis error.”*

The character of our age is such that we are particularly called upon to consider the opinions of those by whom Christianity is rejected,—and by whom, as we shall hereafter see, all religion is rejected,—and to examine the foundations of their system of unbelief.

The number of modern German theologians who have more or less formally attacked the credibility of the Gospels is great. But it may not be very difficult to give a general view sufficiently comprehensive and satisfactory of the modes of reasoning which they have pursued, and of the objections which they have brought forward. The theologians of Germany are much in the habit of writing in chorus, if I may so express myself, and of repeating each other with inconsiderable variations. No other among those who have controverted the truth of our religion has become by

many degrees so conspicuous as Strauss, of whose principal work, "The Life of Jesus," it is my intention to take particular notice. He may fairly be regarded as a representative of the class. The pre-eminence in notoriety which that work has attained above the similar productions of his countrymen, its wide circulation in the original and in translations, and the number of those who have viewed it, either with fear or with favor, as a formidable attack on Christianity, give it a clear title to particular attention. But besides this, it contains a copious collection from various modern authors, the countrymen of Strauss, of what has been regarded as most forcible in their objections to the credibility of the Gospels; and the collection is connected throughout with a theory concerning the origin of Christianity, not, indeed, original with the author, but which is more fully developed by him than by any one of his predecessors.

But, though I thus profess my intention of taking especial notice of the work of Strauss, yet no reader needs to apprehend that his attention will be diverted from the great topics before us to the consideration of the errors, misapprehensions, and incapacity of a particular writer. A reasoner with

the sole purpose of establishing the truth will not take advantage of any want of ability in his opponent. He may incidentally point it out as illustrating the character and qualifications of those by whom what he believes to be the truth is assailed ; but he will not dwell on the mistakes or folly of any writer whom he may think it worth while to controvert, as if these afforded evidence that the propositions maintained by that writer must be false. One advantage, however, and it is sometimes a great advantage, he who is maintaining the truth may derive from the work of an opponent. To arguments the most decisive, other representations may be opposed. A writer may be fully aware that, however conclusive his reasoning may be to his own mind, there are other minds differently constituted and informed that entertain different views. These views, it is true, he may present in his own language. He may put words into the mouth of a supposed objector. But in doing so there is danger that he may seem to be trifling with his readers,— to be making another say what no intelligent man would say. But if he produce what has actually been said, and what many have thought to be forcibly said, he is relieved at once from the suspicion of contending with a man of straw fabricated by himself.

IN treating of the evidence which the Gospels themselves afford of their genuineness and of their authenticity, it is not worth while to attempt to make an artificial separation between those arguments which bear more directly on the one subject, and those which relate more particularly to the other. They run into each other and are intimately blended together; and the ultimate purpose of both is the same.

If the Gospels be authentic, that is, if their contents be true, they are genuine works of their supposed authors; for, if true, they were written by early and well-informed disciples of Christ; and it would be idle to ascribe them to any other disciples of Christ than those to whom the Christian world has assigned them from the beginning. On the other hand, if their genuineness be proved, their truth is established; for it would be folly to suppose that disciples of Jesus, in the midst of unbelievers and enemies, whom it was evidently their purpose to impress with the noblest truths and sentiments of religion and morality, put forth pretended histories of their master full of marvellous fables, and obtained reception for these fables, though they and their contemporaries knew them to be false. In dealing with the historical evi-

dence for the genuineness of the Gospels, we may prove that they were written by those to whom they have been ascribed, without, at the same time, bringing any *direct* proof of their credibility, though the step from one conclusion to the other is, as we have just seen, unavoidable. But, in arguing from their contents to prove their genuineness, it is not practicable, and if it were practicable it would not be desirable, to separate the arguments for their genuineness from those which establish the great truth that they contain the authentic history of a miraculous revelation of God.

The evidence for this truth, as we might expect in regard to a fact so momentous, presents itself on every side. It is constantly opening before us as we pursue new paths of investigation. It may be hidden from view by the interposition of false notions of Christianity and of the Gospels. Conceptions so erroneous may exist concerning our religion and the books containing its history, that the internal evidences of its truth may not apply to the false representations given of the one or the other. There may be no coherence between them. But God, in manifesting himself to the world through Christ, has not left us without abundant witness that he has so manifested himself. The

evidences which Christianity affords of its miraculous origin, the proofs which the “new creation,” as it is called by St. Paul, gives of its author, are in number and variety like those which the natural creation affords of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God. Both may be clouded over by human errors. Both require the exercise of our reason, that we may discern them in their extent and clearness. Both may be disregarded. But they exist.

WHAT may properly be called the internal evidences of the truth of our religion, or, in other words, of the truth of the history contained in the Gospels, are so numerous, so diverse in their character, and appear from so many different points of view, that the subject is not to be exhausted by any one writer or in any one treatise. In explaining the historical evidence for the genuineness of the Gospels, I have been naturally led to point out some of the more important internal proofs of their authenticity. In the present work I shall bring forward others. But a main design of this work is to remove the errors and objections which may counteract the proper influence of these proofs, and thus to leave the mind open to their reception,

from whatever source they may be derived, or in whatever form they may present themselves.

In pursuing this design, we must begin with entirely setting aside one essential misapprehension concerning the intrinsic character of the Gospels. The traditional doctrine has been, that they are not, properly speaking, the works of their reputed authors, but works written by the inspiration of God, or under his immediate suggestion and superintendence. On the one hand, this doctrine is an insuperable obstacle to all just appreciation of that vast amount of evidence for their truth which the Gospels carry with them when properly regarded and understood; and, on the other, it is from this doctrine that the objections with which their genuineness and authenticity have been assailed derive their chief strength.

It having been assumed that they are infallible books, free from the imperfections and mistakes that belong to the works of merely human narrators, and especially to those of writers so uneducated as the Evangelists, when such imperfections and mistakes have been discovered in them, the unbeliever has thought himself to have found an argument against the reality of God's revela-

tion by Christ, while in fact he had found only an argument against a false doctrine.

* * * * *

* It is true, that in a book not expressly intended for the confutation of merely popular errors,— in a work of reasoning addressed to intelligent men, who may be supposed to be so far interested in its subjects as to have exercised some serious thought upon them, and to have made themselves in some degree acquainted with the facts necessary to be attended to in order to form a correct judgment concerning them,— it may seem incongruous and out of place to enter into a confutation of this doctrine as applied to the Gospels. But the assumption that it is necessary for a defender of their trustworthiness to defend their infallibility has afforded the main opportunity for the most plausible attacks which have been made on their credit; while, at the same time, many Christians have

* [The preceding “Introduction” was left unfinished by the author. The following fragment found among his papers, relating to the topic with which it breaks off, was apparently to have been used as a portion of the intended conclusion. It is therefore here printed, but it should be understood that it did not receive the author’s final revision.]

joined with the adversaries of our religion in insisting on the truth of this assumption, and in regarding the doctrine that the Gospels are properly to be referred to God as their author, and are consequently free from error, as essential to Christianity, and the main point to be defended in a controversy concerning its truth. The objections to it — all which it is worth while to urge, since, if these are not considered as decisive, all others must be unavailing — may be stated in a few words. It supposes a miracle of which no proof can be afforded through the evidence of ocular witnesses. It is a miracle the first step in the proof of which is wanting ; for the first step in proving such a miracle is to show that the supposed subject of it claims to write by the authority and under the guidance of God; and the Evangelists put forward no such pretension. There can, it would seem, be no rational ground for ascribing inspiration to a writer who himself does not claim to be inspired. But though the Evangelists do not claim it for themselves, it may be said that they are affirmed to have been inspired by an authority that cannot be questioned ; for St. Paul says, “ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” (2 Timothy iii. 16.) This passage

is the main argument for the supposition ; and it affords a very striking example of the manner in which a few misunderstood but easily remembered words are often detached from the Bible and employed in support of irrational doctrines, in opposition to all else that may be learned from it, and to the plainest dictates of common sense. In regard to those words, it is unnecessary to urge the considerations, that, before an argument in proof of a miracle can be founded upon them, it must be proved that St. Paul was inspired to write them ; and that it must be further proved that the Gospels were in existence when he wrote them, which is very doubtful ; or even the consideration, that, were they in existence, he could not have had them in mind, since it is clear from the context that he referred only to the books of the Old Testament. The words have their whole force, great as it has been upon the minds of English readers, only from the improper use of the word "inspiration" in our common English version, and the consequent false meaning which has been put upon them. Their true meaning may be thus expressed : "The spirit of God is breathed into every book" ; that is, of the Old Testament ; and the only purpose of the Apostle was to assert gen-

erally, what no Christian will deny, that a religious spirit pervades the books of the Old Testament. Hence they are, and were especially to the early converts to our faith, "profitable," &c. I say especially to the early converts, because at the time when St. Paul wrote there was no collection of the books of the New Testament, there was no Christian literature, and certainly nothing in heathen literature, supposing them to have had any familiarity with it, which could supply the place of the books of the Old Testament as a source of religious instruction and religious feelings.

* * * *

But the Gospels themselves afford evidence the most decisive of the question whether they bear the stamp of God's infallibility, or the impress of human minds.

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CHAPTER I.

GENERAL REMARKS ON STRAUSS'S THEORY OF THE ORIGIN
OF CHRISTIANITY.

SINCE the first edition of my work on the Genuineness of the Gospels appeared, an English translation of Strauss's "Life of Jesus" has been published. It is remarkable, considering the general coincidence between the subject of his work and my own, that, with the exception of a few incidental observations, I have hitherto found no occasion, nor even any suitable opportunity, to take notice of it. It contains nothing which invalidates the statement of facts from which I have reasoned, or touches upon the arguments which I have drawn from those facts.

The theory of Strauss respecting the origin of Christianity, which I have formerly very briefly explained,* is essentially coincident with speculations advanced by Volney in a once famous book,

* *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, 2d Ed., Vol. III.
p. lix. Compare Vol. I. pp. 118 - 120.

“The Ruins.” He says: “Conformably to the calculations received by the Jews, nearly six thousand years had passed since the imagined creation of the world.” That time had been fixed for a renovation of the world by a great deliverer of whom there was a general expectation throughout Asia. “This coincidence produced a fermentation in men’s minds. Nothing was thought of but an approaching end. Men interrogated the hierophants and their mystic books, which assigned various periods for it. They expected the Restorer. In consequence of talking about him, some one said that he had seen him; or we may suppose that some enthusiast believed himself to be that personage, and collected partisans. These partisans, deprived of their chief by an incident, true without doubt, but which passed in obscurity, gave occasion, by the stories which they told, to a rumor which was gradually organized into history. On this foundation, all the circumstances of the mythological traditions were very soon arranged, and the result was an authentic and complete system, which it was not permitted to doubt.” *

* “Or, dans les calculs admis par les Juifs, on commençait à comp-

Conformably to what has been before said, Strauss supposes that there was among the Jews

ter près de six mille ans depuis la création (fictive) *du monde*. Cette coïncidence produisit de la fermentation dans les esprits. On ne s'occupa plus que d'une fin *prochaine*; on interrogea les *hiérophantes* et leur livres *mystiques*, qui en assignèrent divers termes; on attendit le *réparateur*; à force d'en parler, quelqu'un dit l'avoir vu, ou même un individu exalté crut l'être et se fit des partisans, lesquels, privés de leur chef par un incident vrai sans doute, mais passé obscurément, donnèrent lieu, par leurs récits, à une rumeur graduellement organisée en histoire: sur ce premier canevas établi, toutes les *circonstances* des *traditions mythologiques* vinrent bientôt se placer, et il en résulta un système *authentique* et *complet*, dont il ne fut plus permis de douter." — *Les Ruines*, (Bruxelles, 1830,) p. 224.

This theory of Volney is immediately followed in his work by another irreconcilable with it, borrowed from his contemporary, Du-puis, the author of the "Origine de tous les Cultes." According to the latter theory, Christ is an allegorical personage, and Christianity is an allegory representing certain celestial phenomena. In this allegory Christ is the sun. Volney (pp. 227, 290) derives the name Christ from the Hebrew word חֵרֶשׁ, *heres* or *cheres*, which signifies the sun, and the name Jesus from Yes, "which is formed by the union of three letters, the numerical value of which is 608, one of the solar periods." It would be hard to find in the book of Volney himself anything more astonishing than the marvellous absurdity of these etymologies. Certainly it would be very difficult to find anything like them in the works of a writer having a reputation for common learning and common honesty. It deserves notice, that when their absurdity was commented on by Dr. Priestley, though Volney replied to his work, he did not undertake to make any defence on this topic. See Priestley's "Observations on the Increase of Infidelity," (1797,) p. 118, seqq.; and his "Letters to Mr. Volney," (1797,) p. 28.

an eager expectation of their Messiah. Jesus, at least during a part of his ministry, regarded himself as the Messiah, as "the greatest and last of the prophetic race." He was consequently so regarded by his followers. The expectation which the Jews entertained of their Messiah was definite, and "characterized by many important particulars." They had formed many imaginations concerning him connected with allegorical and typical misinterpretations of the Old Testament; and, after the appearance of Jesus, there were some among the Jews who converted their imaginations of what the Messiah was to be into fictions of what Jesus had been, and embodied those fictions in a history of his ministry.

I have said, "some among the Jews." This mode of expression is not adopted by Strauss himself, but it is necessarily implied; for the followers of Jesus were a small minority of the Jewish nation. The Jewish people generally rejected him, as not their Messiah, and their leaders persecuted and crucified him as a religious impostor and blasphemer. Nor, according to Strauss, were the supposed fictions concerning him propagated by his immediate disciples, who had witnessed his deeds and listened to his words, his Apostles and

their associates ; nor, consequently, by those who knew and held the truth concerning him as taught by them. To affirm that they were propagated by the Apostles and their associates would be to maintain what the most reckless infidelity has shrunk from directly asserting, namely, that the received history of Jesus is a collection of enormous falsehoods, fabricated by his immediate disciples, and preached by them with ineffable effrontery in the very face of those who knew them to be false. From this simple solution of the origin of our religion, the "mythical" theory of Strauss essentially differs; for, though he does not define the sense in which he uses the term "*mythus*," it is fundamental in his theory that *mythi*, and particularly the *mythi* or fables concerning Jesus, are not generally intentional falsehoods. It is this characteristic alone which distinguishes it from the more obvious and bald solution of the origin of Christianity which has been adverted to.

Thus he quotes, as essentially expressing his own opinions concerning the origin and nature of the *mythi* in the history of Christ, what is said by Otfried Müller concerning the origin and nature of the *mythi* or mythological fables of the ancient Heathens. The words in parentheses in

the following extract are inserted by Strauss to accommodate the language of Müller to his purpose.

Müller contends that the mythological fables of the ancients were not the fictions of one individual or of many, for the purpose of deception. "It is impossible," he says, "to prove that such a caste of deceivers existed in ancient Greece (or Palestine); on the contrary, this skilful system of deception, be it gross or refined, selfish or philanthropic, if we are not misled by the impression we have received from the earliest productions of the Grecian (or Christian) mind, is little suited to the noble simplicity of those times. Hence an inventor of the mythus, in the proper sense of the word, is inconceivable. This reasoning brings us to the conclusion, that the idea of a deliberate and intentional fabrication, in which the author clothes that which he knows to be false in the appearance of truth, must be entirely set aside as insufficient to account for the origin of the mythus." *

The following passage may further illustrate the fundamental idea of Strauss, that the *mythi* or fables contained in the Gospels were not fic-

* Strauss's Life of Jesus, (English Translation,) Vol. I. p. 76.

tions invented by adherents of Jesus for the purpose of deception.

“ Perhaps it may be admitted that there is a possibility of unconscious fiction, even when an individual author is assigned to it, provided that the mythical consists only in the filling up and adorning some historical event with imaginary circumstances ; but that where the whole story is invented, and not any historical nucleus is to be found, this unconscious fiction is impossible. Whatever view may be taken of the heathen mythology, it is easy to show, with regard to the New Testament, that there was the greatest antecedent probability of this very kind of fiction having arisen respecting Jesus, without any fraudulent intention.” *

But if the Gospels were composed by the authors to whom they are ascribed, by Apostles and by those who knew the truth respecting the history of Jesus from the communications of the Apostles, that is, if the positions maintained in “The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels” be correct, the “mythical” theory falls at once to the ground. We are compelled to

* Strauss, I. 80.

recur to the supposition of intentional falsehood on the broadest scale, if those who knew the truth respecting Jesus were the authors of the fables concerning him. Accordingly, Strauss says: "The most ancient testimonies tell us, firstly, that an Apostle, or some other person who had been acquainted with an Apostle, wrote a Gospel history; but not whether it was identical with that which afterwards came to be circulated in the Church under his name; secondly, that writings similar to our Gospels were in existence; but not that they were ascribed with certainty to any one individual Apostle or companion of an Apostle. Such is the uncertainty of these accounts, which after all do not reach further back than the third or fourth decade of the second century. According to all the rules of probability, the Apostles were all dead before the close of the first century; not excepting John, who is said to have lived till A. D. 100; concerning whose age and death, however, many fables were early invented. What an ample scope for attributing to the Apostles manuscripts they never wrote!" *

Thus, according to Strauss, "the external testi-

* Strauss, I. 62.

mony respecting the composition of our Gospels is far from forcing upon us the conclusion, that they proceeded from eyewitnesses or well-informed contemporaries"; * and the internal grounds of evidence determine that such was not their origin.

The following passage may throw further light on the conceptions of Strauss respecting the essential position of his theory, namely, that the Apostles and their associates, the first followers of our Lord and the witnesses of his ministry, are not responsible for the fables contained in the Gospels.

"In the first place," he says, "the fact that many such compilations" (as the Gospels) "of narratives concerning the life of Jesus were already in general circulation during the lifetime of the Apostles, and more especially that any one of our Gospels was known to an Apostle and acknowledged by him, can never be proved. With respect to isolated anecdotes, it is only necessary to form an accurate conception of Palestine, and of the real position of the eyewitnesses referred to, in order to understand that the origination of legends, even at so early a period, is by no means incomprehensible. Who informs us that they must ne-

* Strauss, I. 65.

cessarily have taken root in that particular district of Palestine where Jesus tarried longest, and where his actual history was well known? And with respect to eyewitnesses, if by these we are to understand the Apostles, it is to ascribe to them absolute ubiquity, to represent them as present here and there, weeding out all the unhistorical legends concerning Jesus, in whatever places they had chanced to spring up and flourish." *

According to Strauss, however, the greater part of those fictions concerning Jesus which are embodied in the Gospels, became connected with his history during the period of about thirty years which intervened between his death and the destruction of Jerusalem,† that is, during the period throughout which many of his Apostles and their associates,—the first preachers of our religion,—and the great body of those instructed by them, were living. These fictions did not proceed from, nor were they countenanced by them, nor were they received as true by those who relied on their authority. How, notwithstanding, they obtained such currency as almost immediately to obscure and obliterate his true history, is to be thus explained.

* Strauss, I. 63, 64.

† Ibid., I. 84.

The age, it is true, was “an historical age” (by which term Strauss, I suppose, must be understood as meaning an age in which facts would be recorded, and mythological fables would not find ready currency); but “the pure historic idea was never developed among the Hebrews.” “Indeed, no just notion of the true nature of history is possible, without a perception of the inviolability of the chain of finite causes, and of the impossibility of miracles. This perception, which is wanting to so many minds of our own day, was still more deficient in Palestine, and indeed throughout the Roman empire. And to a mind still open to the reception of the marvellous, if it be once carried away by the tide of religious enthusiasm, all things will appear credible; and should this enthusiasm lay hold of a yet wider circle, it will awaken a new creative vigor, even in a decayed people. To account for such an enthusiasm, it is by no means necessary to presuppose the Gospel miracles as the existing cause. This may be found in the known religious dearth of that period, a dearth so great that the cravings of the mind after some religious belief excited a relish for the most extravagant forms of worship; secondly, in the deep religious satisfaction which was afforded by

the belief in the resurrection of the deceased Messiah, and by the essential principles of the doctrine of Jesus." *

The theory of Strauss necessarily supposes, that Jesus was a very conspicuous individual, who acted strongly on the minds of men. Before this theory can be received, it becomes requisite to explain the very rapid growth of those most extraordinary fictions concerning him, which sprung up and flourished while very many of his contemporaries were still living ; especially as by a great majority of those contemporaries, his enemies, they would be at once indignantly spurned and trampled under foot, as being what they were, monstrous falsehoods ; while by another portion, the first adherents of Jesus, and the original witnesses of his ministry, their growth, to say the least, was not fostered,— they did not rest on their testimony. Strauss has shown himself sensible that an explanation of this phenomenon is requisite ; and the solution which he gives of the sudden development of such an array of fables concerning Jesus may be found in the following passage. It may be readily understood, if we bear in mind what has

* Strauss, I. 64, 65.

been before stated, that according to his theory the Jews had entertained many imaginations concerning their expected Messiah ; and that the process in forming the history of Jesus which has come down to us consisted in converting these imaginations of what was to be into fables concerning Jesus.

He says: "A frequently raised objection remains, the objection, namely, that the space of about thirty years, from the death of Jesus to the destruction of Jerusalem, during which the greater part of the narratives must have been formed, — or even the interval extending to the beginning of the second century, the most distant period which can be allowed for the origin of even the latest of these Gospel narratives, and for the written composition of our Gospels,—is much too short to admit of the rise of so rich a collection of mythi. But, as we have shown, the greater part of these mythi did not arise during that period, for their first foundation was laid in the legends of the Old Testament, before and after the Babylonish exile; and the transference of these legends, with suitable modifications, to the expected Messiah, was made in the course of the centuries which elapsed between that exile and the time of Jesus.

So that, for the period between the formation of the first Christian community and the writing of the Gospels, there remains to be effected only the transference of Messianic legends, almost all ready formed, to Jesus, with some alterations to adapt them to Christian opinions, and to the individual character and circumstances of Jesus: only a very small proportion of mythi having to be formed entirely new." *

This is the only explanation he affords.

It appears, then, according to Strauss, that some time during the thirty or forty years after the death of our Lord, the small body of his followers among the Jews was divided into two parties of very different characters. One was composed of his personal friends and followers, the Apostles and their associates, who knew his true history and doctrines, and who did not propagate those falsehoods concerning him on which the religion of Christians is founded. The other was composed of persons who did propagate those falsehoods. These had their origin, as Strauss suggests, in districts of Palestine where Jesus did not tarry long, and

* Strauss, I. 84, 85.

where his actual history was not well known ; and it would, he says, be ascribing absolute ubiquity to the Apostles to suppose them to have been capable of being present here and there to weed out all the unhistorical legends concerning him in whatever places they had chanced to spring up and flourish.* Those who propagated these fictions concerning him had no intention of deceiving. They were unconscious of falsehood ; they believed that what they related had actually taken place.† They had had so little acquaintance with Jesus, or with the eyewitnesses of his ministry, that they did not know that all which they affirmed concerning him was untrue. On the contrary, they were persuaded that it was true.

But though, as Strauss suggests, their fictions may not originally "have taken root in that particular district of Palestine where Jesus tarried longest,"‡ yet, in order to make converts to the belief of them, it was necessary that they should be preached in parts of Palestine where our Lord had been well known, and where there could be no ignorance respecting the essential facts in his ministry. Here, on the one hand, they would be

* See the quotation from Strauss given before, p. 27.

† See before, p. 22, seqq.

‡ See before, p. 27.

indignantly and vehemently contradicted by the great body of the unbelieving Jews, and, on the other, they would be denied and discountenanced by the true followers of Christ. The innocent impostors, who, in their ignorance, propagated unconsciously such enormous falsehoods concerning him, must have been surprised to find all those acquainted with the facts in his history, whether friends or enemies, utterly confounded, to say the least, by their marvellous stories. One might think that their own confidence would have been shaken by the direct and authoritative evidence which they must have encountered, on every side, of the falsehood of their narrations. It might seem, moreover, that it would be impossible under such circumstances to procure converts to the belief of them. But such was not the case. Their own confidence was not shaken ; they persisted in promulgating their stories, and they triumphed signally. They are the true authors of Christianity. It is to them that we are indebted for the Gospels. Their fictions have supplanted the real history of Christ, the original testimony of eye-witnesses, and have become the foundation of Christian faith. Nor is this all. Keeping themselves out of view, they have had complete suc-

cess in putting their stories before the world as resting on the authority of the Apostles and their associates,—in making them responsible for the marvellous tales. The whole Christian world has believed that these stories proceeded from Apostles and their associates. But it was not so. They proceeded from another party among the followers of Christ, a party that does not appear in history, the existence of which is irreconcilable with all remaining records and memorials of the times when it is supposed to have flourished, utterly irreconcilable with all probability, and which, therefore, was unknown to the world before its discovery by Strauss.

It is to be borne in mind that the distinguishing characteristic of the theory of Strauss, the “mythical” theory of the origin of Christianity, consists in the supposition that the *mythi* or fictions in the history of Jesus were not intentional fabrications for the purpose of deception, but that they sprung up, as it were, spontaneously; those among whom they originated and by whom they were propagated being unconscious of falsehood. If intentional fictions, it is conceded that they are not *mythi*. This, at least, is the general view to be taken of them. The history of Jesus now ex-

tant, which is little more than a mass of fictions, attributing to him throughout a supernatural character and divine authority, could not have proceeded from those who were personally conversant with him, and knew the real events of his life. This fact is fully recognized by Strauss, though not clearly apprehended by him in its necessary relations. His reader should keep it in mind. We must not suffer ourselves to vacillate between two theories wholly inconsistent with each other. The Apostles and their associates were, or were not, the most shameless of impostors. According to Strauss, they were not impostors. It follows that the history of our Lord which the Christian world has received was not derived from them, though it grew to its present form principally while the most, or many, of them were living. It proceeded, therefore, from other individuals, the true originators of Christianity,—anonymous individuals, of whom history has preserved no record, and who must have taught under the circumstances which have been described.*

* "Narrationes in Evangelii traditas, quas rerum vere gestarum esse persuadere mihi non potueram, mythorum in modum, qui inter antiquas gentes inveniuntur, aut in ore populi a minutis initiis coactus et eundo crevisse, aut a singulis, sed qui vere ita evenisse super-

We may next observe, that, however difficult was the task of these teachers of our present religion in persuading the contemporaries and countrymen of an individual so conspicuous as our Lord must have been to give credit to a history of him full of marvels that were utterly devoid of truth, yet this was not the sole, nor the greatest, difficulty which they are supposed to have overcome.

Their teaching consisted, as we are informed by Strauss, in identifying the history of Jesus with the anticipations of the Jews concerning their expected Messiah. The *mythi* respecting this imaginary personage were ready made for their use, and they had only to turn them into historical fictions and accommodate them to Jesus.

stitione in animum induxerant, fictas esse existimaveram. Quod ut sufficit explicandis plerisque eorum, quæ dubitationem moventia tribus prioribus Evangelii continentur: ita quarti Evangelii auctorem ad tuendas et illustrandas sententias suas haud raro meras fabulas scientem confinxisse, a Baurio, theologo Tubingensi doctissimo, nuper ita demonstratum est, ut critici mei judicii rigori religiosius quam verius temperasse intelligam. Dumque prima a Christo secula accuratius perscrutantur, partes partiumque certamina, quibus nova ecclesia commovebatur, in apricum proferunt, narrationum haud paucarum, quas fabulas esse ego bene quidem perspiceram, sed unde ortæ essent demonstrare non valueram, veram in illis primæ ecclesiæ motibus originem detegere theologis Tubingensibus contigit." — Strauss, Vol. I. p. vii.

But every one knows what were the popular expectations of the Jews respecting their coming Messiah. Of him, David, the greatest of their kings, the founder of their monarchy, was in their view the especial type; though in all by which the favor of God had distinguished David, the Messiah was to be far more highly distinguished. He, too, was to be a monarch, the restorer of the kingdom of Israel, a warrior, a conqueror, the deliverer and exalter of his people. Establishing the seat of his empire at Jerusalem, he was to found a kingdom extending over the world and enduring to the consummation of all things, over which he was to rule without a successor. This was the outline of their expectations, which, doubtless, before the coming of our Lord, was filled up, as it has been since, with many particular imaginations, corresponding to its general character.

But, according to Strauss, it was the purpose of those who propagated the fabulous history of Jesus to evince that he was the Messiah through the correspondence of its fictions with the previous expectations of the Jews concerning the Messiah. This history actually shows one striking point of resemblance, in representing Jesus as the last great messenger of God to the Jewish nation, endued

with miraculous powers. But the whole representation of the purpose and effects of his mission, of his personal character, of his humble condition in this world, of his determined repression of all hope of worldly aggrandizement for himself, his followers, or his countrymen, of his annunciation to his immediate disciples, that they must submit to poverty and suffering, and prepare themselves for the last outrage of persecution, together with the account of the apparent triumph of his enemies and of his cruel death,— this representation, if it were a fiction, might seem to have been devised in direct opposition to the expectations of the Jews respecting their Messiah.

But it may be said, that the facts to which I have referred were so notorious, that no other account could be given by the honest impostors, who, unconscious of falsehood, propagated the stories of his miracles. Certainly these facts were so notorious, that no other account could be given but that which we have received. But such being the case, it follows, that no attempt could be more hopeless or more foolish, than an attempt to persuade the Jews that the life and the death, the character, acts, and teachings of Jesus, corresponded to their previous expectations of the Messiah.

So far, indeed, from their finding any such correspondence, we know that, during his ministry and after his death, he was rejected by a very great majority of the nation, as disappointing all their hopes from a Messiah, and exasperating their strongest prejudices.

I have elsewhere spoken of the theory of Strauss as an outrage upon common sense. If the preceding account of it be correct, and no one, I trust, will pretend that it is not, the language which I have used cannot be objected to. But, as may abundantly appear from the evidence afforded by Strauss's work alone, he has many speculatists among his own countrymen to keep him in countenance.

BUT we have as yet viewed this theory only under one aspect; namely, in its relation to the Jewish nation. We will consider it in some other very important relations, in which the author has not presented it, and in regard to which he has, of course, given no explanations.

Christianity had its origin among the Jews, but it is not through them that it has been transmitted to us. From them it was communicated to the Gentiles, the Heathens, our predecessors, from

whom we have received it. But between the Heathen world and the Jewish people there had been previously a wide separation. This separation continued between the Jewish Christians generally and the Gentile Christians. With the exception of the Gospel of Matthew, the former did not use the Gospels received by the latter, — Gospels which attained universal authority among the Gentile Christians. These books were received by them, I do not here say, as authentic histories of Jesus, but as authentic histories of a miraculous revelation from the true God, a God before unknown to the generality among them, — the God whom St. Paul announced as such even at Athens.

From whom, then, did the Heathens receive their knowledge of Christianity and of the Gospels? The theory of Strauss admits but of one answer. According to this theory, they must have received it, not from the main body of the Jewish Christians, but from those few mistaken men among them who, having little or no acquaintance with Jesus, propagated, unconscious of falsehood, those *mythi* concerning him with which the Gospels are filled, and who thus established in the world not merely a fabulous history of him, the professed Messiah, of whom they knew nothing correctly,

but likewise a new religion, embracing the noblest principles of action, founded upon faith in one whose real history they had obliterated or rendered doubtful, and whose character they had essentially misrepresented. This is the only answer which the theory of Strauss admits. But the only answer admitted by authentic history and indisputable facts is, that the Heathens were instructed in Christianity by the immediate followers and companions of our Lord and by their associates,—by those who were perfectly aware whether their teaching was or was not true; that they received our religion from Barnabas and Paul and Luke, from Peter and Mark, from the Apostle John, who resided so long among them, and from others associated with these early teachers. Above all, no degree of folly, I think, certainly none to which a rational person can be required to give heed, will lead any one to pretend expressly that there is any evidence, or any ground whatever for imagining, that the Gospel was preached to the Heathen world in two different forms; in one form by half-crazy fanatics, who filled the history of our Lord with stories of fictitious miracles, and in another by his immediate followers and friends, who told the truth concerning him, whatever that was.

But turning from unquestionable truths, we will enter the region of mere hypothesis. We will clear the ground, as far as possible, of those facts that stand in our way. The Epistles of St. Paul we will regard as forgeries, and the whole history of the propagation of Christianity which may be gathered from the New Testament as a fabrication. We may thus find room for those conclusions that necessarily result from the theory of Strauss concerning the establishment of Christianity in the heathen world.

Though it is implied by him, that we have no evidence of the reception of our present Gospels before the last half of the second century, yet it is acknowledged, or rather maintained, by him, as well as by the other infidel theologians of Germany, that histories of the same essential character existed at a much earlier period. It is not pretended that any history of our Lord essentially at variance with the Gospels, any history in which he was not represented as a teacher from God, whose mission was attested by miraculous displays of God's power, was ever known to the Gentile Christians.

These Christians, therefore, received their instruction in Christianity from the fanatical and

ignorant portion of Christ's disciples. Every one knows what these teachers effected. Let us consider their means and the obstacles which they had to encounter.

They were men very deficient in good sense. They had taken no pains to inform themselves correctly concerning the character, acts, and teaching of him whose disciples they professed to be, and whom they were so zealous in exhorting others to obey. They had, on the contrary, fallen into the grossest mistakes concerning them. God did not "bear them witness with signs and wonders and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit." The pretence that he did so is merely one of the fables which are put forward throughout the New Testament. It was not only morally, but physically, impossible that they should produce any miraculous evidence of the truth of their fictions. Nor were they distinguished for eloquence or ability of any sort, since, though they effected such an astonishing work, history has not even preserved their names, but has falsely substituted for them those of other individuals, Apostles of Christ and the associates of Apostles.

Such were the character and the facilities for

accomplishing their purpose, possessed by these zealous missionaries of falsehood. What obstacles, then, had they to encounter ?

According to Strauss, their main purpose in their mythical history of Christ, which we now find in the Gospels, was to evince that a Messiah (named Jesus) had appeared among the Jews. This was the story which they propagated in the heathen world.

But the heathen world would have regarded only with indifference or ridicule such a story from such preachers, — a story, that a Messiah had appeared among the Jews, a people towards whom the prevalent feelings of the Heathens had been those of dislike and contempt ; and in whose supposed good or ill fortune in the advent of their Messiah, it must have been very hard to persuade them that they had any concern. Admitting, however, that it were possible to excite their attention to the subject, with what ineffable scorn must they have regarded the sort of evidence laid before them ! How would they have listened to proofs founded on a pretended correspondence between a body of incredible fictions and certain passages of a book called the Old Testament, — a book for which they had no respect, which very

many of them probably had never heard of, and which it may be safely presumed no one of them had read, — which passages were represented to them as expressing typically or mystically what the Jews had expected concerning the Messiah ? With how much patience would they have listened to these Jewish proselyting missionaries who had come among them, when these missionaries themselves told them, that the person whom they called on them to receive as the Jewish Messiah had been rejected by his own nation as an impostor and blasphemer, and had, in consequence of his pretensions, suffered a public execution as ignominious as it was cruel ? What must they have thought of this Jewish Messiah, the deliverer of his people, when he was preached to them after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion and ruin of the Jewish nation ? Is it possible, an intelligent reader may ask, that any one can have been so bewildered and confounded by irreligion and mysticism, as to imagine that the most astonishing moral revolution in the history of mankind, the establishment of Christianity in the heathen world, was effected by such agents under such circumstances ?

It is not my intention to proceed at length in such an examination of the theory of Strauss. Were it worth while to exhaust the subject, it is one which could not easily be exhausted. As truth finds continual confirmation flowing in upon every side, in proportion as the views of those who examine it are more comprehensive and correct, so error is continually encountered by new objections, in proportion as it is distinctly contemplated, and its necessary relations clearly understood. I shall therefore confine myself to a very few of the more important aspects of that theory.

CHAPTER II.

REMARKS ON OTHER THEORIES.

If the Gospels be genuine, if the essential facts which I have stated in “The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels” be not erroneously stated, which no one, I believe, will pretend, and if the reasoning upon them be not fallacious, of which every one may judge for himself, the theory of Strauss is wholly excluded ; there is no ground on which it can stand. It becomes evident that it is only one of those many theories which hang in the cloudy region of German speculation, — *οὐτε γῆς οὐτε οὐρανοῦ ἀπτόμενα*, — unconnected with anything on earth or in heaven. If the Gospels were written by Apostles and by those who received their accounts immediately from Apostles, the mythical theory of their having proceeded from men who innocently and unconsciously originated and propagated marvellous stories respecting our Lord must vanish at once into air. Nothing remains for the disbeliever in the historical

facts concerning the origin of our religion, but to fall back on the forlorn hypothesis, that the history of Jesus is throughout fictitious, and that, of all intentional falsifiers, the Apostles were the most shameless and the most successful, — shameless and successful in so marvellous a manner, that no account whatever can be given of it.

If, then, the views which have been taken of the theory of Strauss be correct, nothing can be added, which will exhibit more clearly its incoherent and dreamlike character, or its utter insufficiency to explain either the origin of Christianity, or any one essential fact connected with the origin of Christianity. I pass over, therefore, many other considerations respecting it, which to my own mind seem equally decisive as to its character, and will only make a few remarks on this in common with other theories to account for the establishment of Christianity which have been advanced by such as refuse to admit its miraculous origin. Those theories are very few. To object, not to explain, has been the common work of unbelievers.

PREVIOUSLY to the theory of Strauss, that which was prevalent in Germany supposed, that the facts

recorded in the Gospels, with the exception of those of a miraculous character, were in the main historically true, and that, in regard to the accounts of miracles which they contain, those likewise were founded on certain facts which actually took place, but facts in the common course of nature, to which a miraculous character was given only through the misapprehension of those by whom they were witnessed. But it did not attempt to explain how Christianity was established in the world through this misapprehension of some ignorant Jews, whose folly was regarded with contempt and indignation by a very great majority of their countrymen. This theory has passed, or is rapidly passing, into a matter of history, and there it will stand, as a melancholy proof of the intellectual and religious state of men in a large portion of civilized Europe during the latter part of the last and the beginning of the present century.

In regard to these two theories, and the speculations, generally, of infidel writers respecting the origin of Christianity, there are some preliminary considerations which are essential to forming a correct judgment on the subject, but which have been greatly neglected or kept out of view.

Let him who is reasoning against the divine origin of our religion fix any period he may choose for the commencement of its authentic history, still at this period phenomena present themselves of a character altogether wonderful and unparalleled.

We may take, for example, the last quarter of the second century, and regard as fabulous all the previous history of Christianity. What, then, is to be found at this period?

We find the miraculous history of Jesus, — the history of a Jew who was represented to have been commissioned by the God of the Jews to instruct and command all men in his name, — we find this history, as it is recorded in the four Gospels, received with an immovable conviction of its truth, by a great number of heathen converts. They were steady in affirming that this history, and the books in which it is contained, had been received by them from those who had made known to them the new religion, — from Apostles of Christ and their associates. From whom, indeed, could they have received the history of Christ's ministry, the truth of which they believed so firmly, except from those by whom Christ had been made known to them, and on whose teaching their faith in him rested? Of the strength of their belief

they gave sure proof by the marvellous change which it wrought in their hearts and lives, by the wide separation which it produced between them and the heathen world, by their readiness to submit to all the deprivations and evils which it brought upon them; and even when they shrunk from torture and death, it was not that their belief was shaken, but that their courage failed. Here is one group of remarkable phenomena to be accounted for. Let us look at another.

In an age which has afforded pictures of the darkest and most revolting depravity prevailing throughout the heathen world, in the midst of such men as had furnished materials for the histories of Tacitus and Suetonius,—histories from which so much more may be inferred by a Christian reader than is told by the heathen writers,—at a period when pagan ignorance and superstition had become inflamed into persecuting bigotry, we find Christianity in existence and extending its power, in opposition to the strong antipathy and resistance of the evil by which it was surrounded. To use the words of a Christian then living, Tertullian, it was “converting men to the worship of the true God, causing them to reject error, and

forming them to righteousness, chastity, patience, mercy, innocence." If there be any truth in any religion, if there be a God who cares for men, if men are immortal beings, if there be any responsibility for our actions beyond this life, if that doctrine be not false which teaches us to regard ourselves as spiritual beings, and not as perishing animals, if there be anything ennobling or consolatory beyond what atheism may afford,—whatever can give value to religion is found in Christianity. And Christianity was existing in the second century. How is this fact to be accounted for?

Such is the character of our religion, that those who have denied its divine origin have generally, in modern times, been disposed to pay it a show of reverence, and, while rejecting its history and its authority, to belie its name and assume it for their infidel theories. Even Strauss gives us to understand, that "he is filled with veneration for every religion, and especially for the substance of the sublimest of all religions, the Christian, which he perceives to be identical with the deepest philosophical truth"; * that is, with the atheistic phi-

* Vol. III. p. 397.

losophy of Hegel. Whatever inconsistency or folly there may be in this assertion, I do not suppose that it is to be regarded as ironical mockery. His fellow-laborer, Baur, as I have formerly remarked, insists on the intimate connection between the atheistic philosophy of Hegel and Christianity, so that the former transfers to itself the entire substance of the latter.* No one will so misunderstand me as to suppose that I quote these passages as deserving consideration, regarded as the testimonies of the individual writers to the value of Christianity; for the Hegelian philosophy of these writers has not even any false semblance of Christianity, though it might ally itself with the religion of the Tartars, which teaches the incarnation of the divinities in human bodies, that is, in the Lamas; — I only quote them to show that Christianity, however grossly it may have been misunderstood and perverted, however the study of its character and its evidences may have been and is neglected, has yet, with the progress of morals and intelligence, taken so strong a hold on all which is excellent in the minds and hearts of men, that its enemies, while assailing it, are

* See Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels, II. 45, 46.

obliged, in order to secure followers, to inscribe its name on their banners.

BUT not only was Christianity in existence in the second century; there is another astonishing phenomenon to be accounted for. It is the conception of its Founder presented in the Gospels, the view given in them of his character and his ministry. It is a conception to which human history or human experience offers no parallel or resemblance, — one apparently surpassing the power of any human genius to have formed from such materials as the heathen world could furnish him, from any comprehension of religious truth he might derive from it, or from any knowledge or imagination it might afford or suggest of the moral nature and capacities of man. Yet this portraiture of an individual in all its supernatural grandeur is found in works which, considered merely as literary compositions, are rude, imperfect, fragmentary, — in the works of men whom it would be folly to speak of as inspired by human genius, and to whom, if we regard them as fanatical or false or foolish, we can ascribe no comprehensive and correct notions of moral truth, and no sustained elevation

of moral sentiment. It is found in the productions of Jews who evidently had no superiority over many of their countrymen through their natural gifts, or through the advantages of such an education as Galilee or Judæa could furnish; but whose writings, on the contrary, make it apparent that they had no command of appropriate expression in any language, and especially in the foreign language of the Greeks. What is to be said respecting this wonderful combination of incongruous facts?

The character of Jesus, as it appears in the Gospels, is not that of a truly wise and good man, placed in such circumstances as may occur in the course of God's ordinary providence, exposed to severe trials in an irreligious age, yet unbroken and unshaken by evil, thoroughly penetrated and supported by a sense of his own immortality and of his relation to God, and devoting all the powers which nature has given him to the service of his fellow-men. No human genius has ever exhibited, by a series of actions and words, an imaginary delineation of such an individual. Nor is this the character which is presented to us with so much distinctness in the Gospels; but one which it must have been far more difficult

to portray before its actual appearance on earth. Even should we connect with the conception just presented the further trait, that the individual supposed is, from the impulse of his own mind, a great moral and religious reformer, strenuously laboring to raise others to the same elevation with himself, we should not embrace in it the distinctive characteristics by which Jesus Christ was separated from all other men. How, then, is he represented in the Gospels?

In the Gospels, in these rude works of unlettered Jews, we find an account of the actions and words of one who is represented as having been the immediate minister of God, associated with him as no other finite being within our knowledge ever was, speaking to mankind in his name, and certified to men as his representative by extraordinary manifestations of God's power, altogether different from that divine energy on which the regular course of the physical universe depends. To this fundamental conception the account given of him fully corresponds. He satisfies the highest imaginations that we can form of such a teacher. He lives only for God and for man. All selfish purposes and passions and fears are put aside by him. He does not falter in his

course, through any human weakness. The boldest assumptions of authority and of the most intimate connection with God, are so accordant with the whole representation of him, that we read them without a thought of their utter and shocking incongruity supposing him not to be the delegate and representative of God. — “No one knows the Father but the Son, and he to whom it is the will of the Son to reveal him.” — “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” — “The words which I speak are not mine, but the Father’s who sent me.” — “I and my Father are one,” or, as we might express it, “are the same.” — “I am the resurrection and eternal life.” — “It is the will of Him who sent me, that every one who puts his trust in the Son should have eternal life.” — “Whoever obeys my teaching will never see death.” — “All power is given me in heaven and on earth.” The power of the Omnipotent will support that cause for which he has sent me, the cause of truth and righteousness.

These declarations are uttered with the perfect calmness of undoubting superiority. Whether the conception set before us be real or fictitious, there can be no doubt about the truth of the words, “Never did man speak like this man.”

This, then, is the presentation of a character of inappreciable grandeur. But there is another aspect under which Jesus appears in the Gospels, wholly contrary to all vulgar notions of grandeur. In this aspect there is nothing answering to any previous imaginations which most of us, probably all of us, might form concerning the appearance in this world of a messenger from God. He who claimed to speak in the name of God was a poor Jew of Galilee. His connections were all in the humbler classes of society. He was uneducated. "Whence," asked the Jews, "has this man his learning, having never been instructed?" He was regarded with scorn as well as with fear by the powerful and rich among his countrymen. He was scourged by the order of a Roman governor. He was exposed to the insults of Roman soldiers. He suffered, by a public execution, that terrible death of agony and infamy, which was ordinarily inflicted only on the most odious criminals, or the most despised captives and unpitied slaves.

Thus is the delegate of God, he who was entitled to be called the Son of God, brought before our eyes in the Gospels. Were we to form a previous conception of the coming of a messenger from God to men, we might imagine him an angel descend-

ing in glory from the visible heavens, or a Messiah coming no one knew whence, a monarch, perhaps, ruling with unresisted wisdom and benevolence, and establishing throughout his kingdom the laws of God, or a prophet, impressing all around him with supernatural awe, and listened to only to be obeyed. Certainly we should free our conception from all that might seem degrading in the eyes of men, and embody in it all that we might think likely to command admiration and homage.

But when we turn from our imaginations to the realities presented in the Gospels, we perceive that in their exhibition of the office, character, and life of Jesus, the parts which separately viewed may seem so discordant blend themselves into one harmonious whole. The dark cloud is a part of the magnificent spectacle as essential as the flood of glory which pours over it. The Saviour of men came to teach us that all worldly distinctions are as nothing, compared with those which concern our spiritual nature and our immortal being; — and how could he have taught this, if he had not himself trodden them under foot? He came to teach that men are estimated by God very differently from the manner in which they had estimated and do still ordinarily estimate each other; — that, in the

burning light of eternal truth and justice, all that is accidental to character, all that imposes on human weakness, disappears ; and nothing remains as an object of God's approbation but essential, indestructible virtue. He came to teach us the vanity of all merely human glory, and this lesson he could not have given, if he had been invested with the splendors of earth, or with more magnificent splendors from heaven, that he might overpower the imaginations of men. He came to teach us not by words alone, but by embodying his teaching in his life, that no sufferings should cause us to turn aside from duty. He came to form men by the most effectual, the only effectual means,— by his own example,— to the practice of the hardest and the highest virtues, those virtues which can be called into action only by severe trials. How could this have been done by such a messenger from God as we might, in our folly, imagine as suitable to the grandeur of the mission ? He could, indeed, have proclaimed to us, that, when duty requires it, we must submit to any deprivation, to pain and death, and even be ready to bear our cross to the place of our execution. But what would have been the effect of such a declaration compared with that of the words of Jesus : “ Let

him who would be my follower renounce himself, and come after me, bearing his cross"? He came to bring hope to a world full of suffering, in which he heard all around him the wailing of wretchedness, as it may everywhere be heard at the present day by him whose ears the spirit of the religion of Jesus has opened to its cry. He came to men, as they were and as they are, sinning, sorrowing, insecure in all that they love on earth, often oppressed with gloom, often tried by severe afflictions, worn perhaps by disease and pain, seeing others perishing by the last extremities of misery and famine, and all fellow-travellers to death;—he came to us whose real life, at its best, is often so different from its show to the world; and he came to bring strength and consolation. Not before the throne of a monarch, nor in the presence of an angel, could we look for sympathy. It is when standing before the cross, while contemplating the death of the chosen of God, that we recognize one bound to us by a common nature, by community of suffering and by mutual sympathies, Jesus the strengthener, and Jesus the fellow-sufferer.

Looking back from the cross of Jesus on his preceding ministry, what is the image of him which

we receive from the Gospels? If it have been truly impressed on our hearts, we turn away unsatisfied from the highest efforts of painting to embody in his lineaments the expression of his character. Poetry can add nothing to our conceptions. It may render them more distinct and vivid, but it will affect us only in proportion as we believe it conformed to reality. It is to the perception of essential reality that we owe the thrilling sense of moral interest and grandeur produced by the image it has called up of

“that calm, sorrowful, prophetic eye
With its dark depths of grief, love, majesty ;
And the pale glory of the brow,— a shrine
Where Power sat veiled, yet shedding softly round
What told that He could be but for a time uncrowned.”

SUCH as we have seen is the representation of the office, life, and character of Jesus contained in the Gospels. We have been reasoning, it will be remembered, on the supposition that all the early history of our religion before its establishment among the Gentiles is essentially fabulous. But the existence of this conception of Jesus in the midst of the pagan world remains to be accounted for. A solution, likewise, is to be given of the other phenomena of which we have taken so rapid

a view. What explanation does infidelity afford? The subject early exercised the minds of unbelievers. During the last two or three centuries strong efforts have been made to disprove the miraculous origin of Christianity; and of late the work has been laboriously carried on by many writers, some calling themselves Christians, and others not assuming that name. What, then, are the last results? What is the theory now most approved by such writers concerning the origin and establishment of Christianity?

The theories which have been advanced may be resolved into one. It is this,—that the origin and establishment of our religion, with all the phenomena to which our attention has just been directed, are the result of the efforts of certain Jews, who, if not fraudulent fanatics, grossly misconceived, in some way or other, the character of him whose history and office they pretended to make known; that, by means which are not explained, they imposed their fabulous stories, not only on some of their own countrymen, but also on the Heathens, while at the same time they presented to them the highest conceptions ever formed of religion and duty; and that these stories, after having been somewhat changed by tradition, finally

coalesced into the four Gospels. Whatever may be the first thoughts that such a solution suggests to a philosopher, one of his last reflections may probably be on the vast difference which it has pleased God to ordain among men in their intellectual capacity and their moral perceptions and feelings.

CHAPTER III.

EXAMINATION OF STRAUSS'S TWO FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF CRITICISM.

FROM these general considerations we return to our immediate task, a notice of the work of Strauss. His general theory concerning the origin and establishment of Christianity is such as we have seen. The main body of his work is occupied in supporting this theory by an attack on the credibility and genuineness of the Gospels.

“The sole purpose of the whole work that follows,” he says, in his Introduction, “is to examine the Gospels in detail in order to determine on internal grounds the credibility of their relations, and in connection with this the probability or improbability that the Gospels are the work of eyewitnesses, or, generally, of well-informed writers.”*

In this examination the two principles which he lays down as tests, either of which is sufficient to

* Leben Jesu, I. 64; Engl. Translation, I. 57.

determine that “an account is not historical,” that is, that it is not to be believed, are these:—

First. “An account is not historical, when it is irreconcilable with the known and universal laws which govern the course of events.” *

Second. “An account which lays claim to any historical value must not be inconsistent with itself, nor contradict other accounts.” †

With respect to the first of these principles, “the impossibility of a miracle,” a conclusion which, according to Strauss, has been established “by a series of the most laborious researches, continued for centuries,” it must rest on the truth of one of two assertions.

He who affirms it must either maintain that there is no power capable of producing other effects than those which men witness in the regular course of nature; or he must maintain that, if any being possesses such power, we may be fully assured that he will never exercise it.

But if there is a being who may properly be

* Leben Jesu, I. 100; Engl. Translation, I. 87.

† As this is so extraordinary a proposition, it seems right to give the original: “Mit sich selbst und mit anderen Berichten darf eine Relation nicht in Widerspruch stehen, wenn sie geschichtliche Geltung ansprechen will.”—Leben Jesu, I. 101; Engl. Translation, I. 89.

called God, the presumption and folly of either proposition preclude any argument respecting it such as might be addressed to an intelligent man. If the existence of such a being as men have conceived of under the name of God be denied, the question respecting the historical evidences of Christianity is shut out, and the only question remaining — a question to be first settled — is about the truth of atheism.

If the proposition be fully established, that a miracle is impossible, it is a futile labor to fill many pages with criticisms intended to show that the narratives of the pretended miracles found in the Gospels are incoherent and contradictory to one another. But it is the application of Strauss's second principle to the criticism of the Gospels which alone will interest an English reader, except so far as he may be curious to know the last products of German speculation concerning religion, and the last accepted theory of infidelity.

This fundamental principle is enunciated by him with his customary indefiniteness and incorrectness, and the consequent absence of any tenable meaning.

“An account,” he says, “which lays claim to any historical value, must not contradict other

accounts." It is only after two or three pages, that he incidentally recognizes the truth, that, "when two narratives mutually exclude each other, one only is thereby proved to be unhistorical." *

But this is not the only great oversight in the position taken by Strauss. He speaks of one narrative as contradicting another, in a sense wholly indefinite. In what respects must two narratives contradict each other, that the credit of one or both may be invalidated? Certainly in the essential points of the narration. If they agree in these, no further agreement is ordinarily to be expected. Absolute freedom from error is not a common attribute of the most credible history, and it would be a marvel if it were found in four different relations of the same series of transactions. Two professedly independent histories of the same events would present, I do not say a very suspicious character, but a character wholly unexampled, if they agreed together throughout, if no real or apparent discrepancies were to be found between them. And in proportion as any important fact is confirmed by a greater number of witnesses, so may we expect to find more discrepancies and

* Vol. I. p. 92, Engl. Translation.

contradictions in the accounts of particular circumstances attending it. But, conformably to the vagueness of his general proposition, Strauss, throughout his criticism on the Gospels, neglects the distinction between essential contradictions and unimportant differences, and deals with the latter as if they were of the same class with the former.

Thus, after laying down his rule, he proceeds immediately to illustrate it in the following manner:—

“The most decided case falling under this rule, amounting to a positive contradiction, is when one account affirms what another denies. Thus, one Gospel [that of Matthew] represents the first appearance of Jesus in Galilee as subsequent to the imprisonment of John the Baptist, whilst another Gospel [that of John] remarks, long after Jesus had preached both in Galilee and in Judæa, that ‘John was not yet cast into prison.’” *

I believe that this statement of Strauss is erroneous. But it is not here necessary to discuss this subject. Supposing it not to be erroneous, what will follow? It will follow that one or the other Evangelist had been misinformed as to the time of

* Vol. I. p. 89.

John's imprisonment, or that, writing after an interval of probably more than thirty years, his recollection of it was incorrect. It would not follow that John was not imprisoned; nor would any doubt be cast on the essential facts which the two Evangelists relate concerning him. Nor would it follow that either of them was disqualified, by his mistake about the precise time of John's imprisonment, from being a trustworthy witness of what he had seen and heard as a companion of Jesus during his ministry.

THE character of Strauss's criticism on the Gospels, and of his reasoning upon them generally, admits of being illustrated by applying it to the accounts given by different heathen authors of almost any remarkable event which they have related in common. But it is difficult to give such an illustration; because, on any subject of profane history, there is danger that even a subdued copy of his manner may have an air of burlesque unsuitable to a grave discussion. Where the subject offers nothing to pervert the action of common sense, the absurdity of the conclusion to be arrived at by his mode of reasoning presents itself too glaringly at the very commencement of the argu-

ment. Nor would it be tolerable to give at length an imitation of his prolixity, and his discussion of immaterial and irrelevant topics. But, notwithstanding these hindrances, we may, with the omission of many particular circumstances and in a simple and imperfect form, apply his process, taking for a subject the assassination of Cæsar. The purpose, it is to be conceived, is to show that the narratives of this event are entitled to no historical credit, but, on the contrary, are to be regarded as different forms of a “mythus.” The account of it occupies less than twenty lines in the copy of Suetonius lying before me.

Suetonius relates, that when Cæsar had seated himself in the theatre of Pompey where the Senate was assembled, the conspirators stood round him. Cimber Tullius, as he says, had agreed to take the lead. Accordingly, he immediately approached Cæsar, as if to make some request. Thus the story appears to have originally stood; but in the process of tradition men were not content with so simple a statement. An imaginary subject was invented for this request, which in fact was never purposed, namely, the recall of his brother from exile. Appian represents the request to have been actually made; and Plutarch, proceeding still fur-

ther, says that the other conspirators actually joined in it. But no reason can be supposed why they should have thought it necessary to go through this preliminary to their bloody act. In contradiction to all these accounts, Dion Cassius says that “one of the conspirators,” (this indefinite expression, as we shall see, deserves to be remarked,) “when it was time, came to him as if to acknowledge a favor.” The account of Dion, taken alone, is unobjectionable, except on one ground ; namely, that it does not appear how any one could signify by his looks alone that he had the purpose of acknowledging a favor ; especially how this could be done by a conspirator agitated by such feelings as must naturally have accompanied the intention to perpetrate the murder of a person like Cæsar, whose presence struck awe into all around him.

If these contradictions and improbabilities cast suspicion on the story, this suspicion is heightened by the want of agreement among its different relators as to the name of the person who is said to have come near to Cæsar. Dion, as we have seen, does not venture to give any name. Suetonius calls him Cimber Tullius, a strange appellation, as no other example has been produced of Cimber used as a prænomen. Seneca, writing

about half a century before Suetonius, calls him Tillius, or perhaps Tullius, Cimber; thus changing Cimber into an agnomen. Plutarch, in his Life of Cæsar, calls him Metillius Cimber; but in his Life of Brutus, Tullius Cimber. And, finally, Appian gives him the name of Atilius Cimber. It is easy to understand that the name of an individual so conspicuous that the conspirators, men of noble rank, had assigned to him the lead in the attack on Cæsar, would not have been so confounded and lost.

In respect to the question whether the story is to be regarded as of any historical validity or not, the passage of Seneca, in his eighty-seventh Epistle, which has been already alluded to, is of great importance. He is discussing the question whether a secret may be intrusted to a man intemperate in the use of wine. He says: "That assassination of C. Cæsar, I mean him who, after subduing Pompey, ruled the Commonwealth, was intrusted to Tillius Cimber as well as to C. Cassius. Cassius through his whole life drank only water. Tillius Cimber was excessive in the use of wine, and a brawler." We have no means of ascertaining the precise date of this Epistle. But Seneca died A. D. 65, and Cæsar was assassinated, according

to the common account, B. C. 45. Seneca was a philosopher, and wrote for intelligent readers. But we find, that within a century, or perhaps a little more, after the supposed assassination of Cæsar, Seneca, in speaking of it, was obliged to explain whom he meant by C. Cæsar. "I mean him," he says, "who, after subduing Pompey, ruled the Commonwealth." When so little was known in the time of Seneca of the history of the Cæsar who was reported to have been assassinated in the midst of the assembled Senate, that intelligent readers could need such a specification of his person, it is clear that little or no reliance can be placed on the accounts of later writers than Seneca, (as are all the historians who tell the story,) concerning the manner of his death.

There is, moreover, a striking inconsistency between this passage of Seneca and what is asserted by the subsequent narrators of the event. According to them, Cassius, and Brutus incited by Cassius, were leaders in the conspiracy. Their accounts are fairly represented in the famous play of Shakespeare on this subject. Cassius, more than any one else, appears as the author of the plot. But Seneca, putting him on a level with Tillius Cimber, whom he represents as a drunkard and a brawler,

says that the secret of the conspiracy was *intrusted* to him,—*tam creditum est Tillio Cimbro quam C. Cassio*. No one can think that, if he had regarded Cassius as the author of the conspiracy, or even as a principal conspirator, he would have spoken of the secret of the conspiracy as having been *intrusted* to him.

But it is time to return to the detail of the supposed assassination. Suetonius says, that Cimber Tullius, upon Cæsar's repulsing him by a gesture, laid hold of Cæsar's robe on both shoulders. He indicates no purpose in his doing so; but this purpose was supplied by tradition in two opposite forms, as I shall now proceed to show.

Suetonius does not represent Tullius as pulling off Cæsar's toga, or robe. This circumstance is added by Plutarch, who says, that he pulled it *off from his neck*,—*ἀπὸ τοῦ τραχῆλου*,—or, as he expresses it in another place, “he pulled it *off* with both hands from his shoulders.” The account of Dion agrees essentially with that of Plutarch. But Appian says, that, dragging his (Cæsar's) garment, he drew it *upon* his neck, *τὸ εἷμα περισπάσας ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον εἰλκε*.* Was the idea in Appian's

* I do not understand (I here speak in my own person, not that of Strauss) how Schweighæuser, in his edition of Appian (III. 776),

mind, that by dragging Cæsar's garment round him the free use of his arms would be prevented? And did Plutarch and Dion, on the other hand, conceive that by pulling it off he would be more exposed to the blows of the conspirators, their weapons being less likely to be impeded by its folds?

Whatever may be imagined respecting this action of Tullius Cimber, as we may call him, there is another account common to Suetonius, Plutarch, Appian, and Dion, which cannot be reconciled with historical probability. According to them all, Cæsar, when dying, covered his face and the lower part of his body with his robe, that he might fall in a decent manner. The same robe which had either been pulled away from him, or dragged round him, so as to confine his arms! Suetonius thus describes this circumstance:—“*togâ caput obvolvit: simul sinistrâ manu sinum ad ima crura deduxit, quo honestius caderet, etiam inferiore corporis parte velatâ.*” But how could Cæsar, when dying under twenty-three wounds, (for there is a suspicious agreement among Suetonius, Plutarch, and Appian in mentioning this precise number,) —

could suppose that these words were to be rendered, *Cimbrum togam Cæsaris prehensam deorsum traxisse, ut collum nudaretur.*

have retained strength enough to recover his robe from the conspirators, or, (if we receive the account of Appian,) to have unwound it from his body, so that he might dispose it in a more becoming manner? If he had had the strength remaining to do so, what probability is there, that the conspirators would have stood quietly round while he was performing the acts reported? Their ferocious attack on him, as we shall see by and by, was continued till life was extinct, so as to leave him no possibility of thus attending to decorum.

The discrepancies among the different accounts of the transaction are so great, as to compel us, even while noticing only the most important, to retrace our steps, and to resume the narrative at a period preceding the supposed death of Cæsar. Suetonius says, that the signal having been given by Cimber's laying hold of the robe of Cæsar, Cassius wounded him in front a little below the throat. But Plutarch agrees with Suetonius neither as to the name of the person who gave the first wound, nor the position in which he was standing, nor the nature of the wound. The wound, he says, was given by Casca, who was standing behind Cæsar, and who wounded him, he in one place says, "in the neck," and in another, "in the shoulder";

while Appian, differing from both, says, that Casca reached over Cæsar's head, and, aiming at his throat, missed, and wounded him in the breast. All certain history disappears in the confusion of these contradictory accounts.

We will now pass in review the different words reported to have been uttered during the attack on Cæsar, by him and by others. Suetonius relates, that, when Cimber laid hold of his robe, he exclaimed, "That is violence," — *Ista quidem vis est.* Plutarch, Appian, and Dion say nothing of this exclamation. Appian relates, that Cimber called out, in Greek, to the other conspirators, "Friends! why do you delay?" — *Tί βραδύνετε, ὡ φίλοι;* But, again, nothing is said of this by the other narrators. The account of Plutarch is also peculiar to himself. He says that Cæsar, when struck by Casca, turned round upon him and laid hold of his sword, crying out in Latin, "Villain! what do you mean?" and that Casca at the same instant called to his brother in Greek, saying, "Brother, help!" Each historian has his own separate story; and how is this to be accounted for except by supposing that they are all equally destitute of any historical basis, and are the products of an ever-varying tradition?

The story of Plutarch is expressly contradicted by Suetonius, who says, that Cæsar, after receiving the first blow, “uttered only a single groan, but did not speak”; he died *uno modo ad primum ictum gemitu sine voce edito*. Tradition, however, had burdened itself with another story of words uttered by Cæsar, which, though it is expressly rejected by Suetonius and Dion, and not mentioned by Plutarch and Appian, has yet become classical in modern times. “He did not speak,” says Suetonius, “though some have related that, when M. Brutus assaulted him, he said to him, ‘And are you one of them? you, my son?’” The question has even been discussed by modern critics, for what reason Cæsar called Brutus his son. But though the story has become classical, we perceive in it, as it is now commonly told or alluded to, a new influence of tradition in changing its form since it was first reported. The supposititious words ascribed to Cæsar are given by Suetonius in Greek, to the effect of the rendering above. But the words now put into Cæsar’s mouth are commonly in Latin: *Et tu Brute! mi fili!* “And you too, Brutus! my son!”

No accounts can be more contradictory to each other than those of Suetonius and Appian concern-

ing the behavior of Cæsar during the attack on him. The essential trait of that of Suetonius, namely, the silence of Cæsar, has already been brought to notice. Suetonius says, that, when he received his first wound from Cassius (not Casca, it is to be remembered), “he seized his arm and pierced it with his writing-style, and endeavored to spring forward, but was hindered by another wound. Then, perceiving that he was aimed at on every side with drawn daggers, he covered his head with his robe, and with his left hand drew it down to his feet, that he might fall in a more decorous manner, even the lower part of his body being covered. And thus he was pierced with three-and-twenty wounds, uttering only a single groan at the first blow, but no words.” With this compare the account of Appian, who relates, that, on receiving the first wound from Casca (not Cassius), he seized his arm, and, springing down from his seat, dragged Casca with much violence; and that, while struggling with him, he was wounded by four others of the conspirators, and turned upon each of them, “raging and roaring like a wild beast,” — *σὺν ὄργῃ καὶ βοῇ, καθάπερ θήριον*, — till at last he fell by the statue of Pompey. What narrative entitled to any historical credit could be constructed out of

these two accounts? Plutarch's relation rather corresponds with that of Appian in the more important parts of the detail. Dion's agrees essentially with that of Suetonius.

Cæsar fell, says Appian, by the statue of Pompey. Of this Suetonius and Dion knew nothing. It is plainly a traditional embellishment of the story, which was greedily received by the romance of after times. The purpose of it was to represent Pompey, though dead, as triumphing over his once victorious rival. His statue was probably conceived of as informed by his spirit, for Plutarch relates that Cassius, though inclined to the doctrines of Epicurus, was said, before the commencement of the attack on Cæsar, to have turned his eyes to the statue of Pompey, and silently invoked his aid; and, though it is hard to understand how any one could become acquainted with the silent prayer of Cassius, yet the supposed indwelling of the spirit of Pompey in his statue agrees with the superstition of the age. The feeling which gave rise to this embellishment is fully discovered in the narrative of Plutarch. He says, Cæsar, "either by chance, or being pushed thither by the conspirators, fell at the pedestal of Pompey's statue, which was covered with his blood; so that Pompey

seemed to preside over the vengeance inflicted on his enemy, who was lying at his feet in his last agonies, pierced with many wounds."

HERE we will stop in our illustration, not of Strauss's manner of writing,—for no illustration of this could be given in any reasonable number of pages,—but of the intrinsic character of his criticism. My purpose has been to make it evident that this sort of criticism is inapplicable to human testimony, to profane history equally as to the Gospels; and that its results have no tendency to invalidate the essential truth of any narratives subjected to it. I speak of that spurious criticism, which, setting aside all the knowledge respecting the fallibility and inaccuracy of human testimony that experience is continually teaching us, represents it as an objection to the essential truth of an account found in the narratives of different writers, that these narratives do not agree with each other in all their parts, that they are more or less incrusted with errors of various kinds, and that none of them is without flaws. Truth is not dug from the mine of history as *one entire and perfect chrysolite*, any more than it is so found in the every-day relations of common life. Different original ac-

counts of the same series of events, when they agree in the main facts, but are inconsistent in minor particulars, confirm each other; since they show that the narrators give independent testimony, and had each separate sources of information, while, on the contrary, were it possible to find different accounts professedly original, perfectly agreeing in all their details, this would be a phenomenon hitherto so unknown, as either to justify the suspicion of collusion in the writers, or to lead at once to the inference, that we had, in fact, but the testimony of one witness, whom the others had copied.

Were there a prepossession against the truth of the history of Cæsar, did this subject concern the religious character and moral responsibility of men, a work composed after the manner of Strauss, with the design of proving that history to be fabulous, would, I doubt not, find as many admirers as there have been of Strauss's own work on the Gospels, who would look upon it, with equal justice, as a learned and elaborate piece of reasoning. Certainly one speaks very far within bounds in saying, that the accounts of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, given in the four Gospels, which Strauss has subjected to his microscopic

criticism,* present no such contradictions and improbabilities as exist, not merely in the accounts of the assassination of Cæsar, as given by the four historians whom I have quoted, but throughout the ancient narratives and notices of his life.

In the first volume of "The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels," in an Additional Note "On the Origin of the Correspondences among the First Three Gospels," I have pointed out discrepancies and inconsistencies among the Gospels, the number of which bears a large proportion to the number of all those which Strauss has remarked upon in his three volumes. But it did not enter my mind, nor, I will venture to assert, has it entered the mind of any one of my readers, that I could be considered as undermining the authenticity of the Gospels. On the contrary, I believed that I was establishing their authenticity by showing that the discrepancies among

* In remarking on the criticism of Strauss, one is reminded of the lines of Pope:—

"The critic eye, that microscope of wit,
Sees hairs and pores, examines bit by bit:
How parts relate to parts, or they to whole,
The body's harmony, the beaming soul,
Are things which Kuster, Burman, Wasse, shall see
When man's whole frame is obvious to a flea."

them were of such a character, that, when considered in connection with their essential agreement, it was evident that the writers of those books must either have been Apostles, or have derived their information from Apostles. The discrepancies among the Gospels have, from the time of Origen, been familiar to Christians, and made subjects of discussion by them. They have been urged, and correctly urged, to disprove the theological doctrine of the divine authorship of the Gospels, or, in other words, the doctrine of their inspiration. The novelty of Strauss's work consists in the use which he has made of them to disprove the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels, considered as the proper works of human authors;—not, indeed, in the assumption of the principle on which he has proceeded, but in his indefatigable prolixity in the application of it. Neither the principle nor the application of it is in itself new. For example, one of the most notorious, and not of the least able, of infidel writers thus reasons:—

“ Not any two of these writers [the Evangelists] agree in reciting *exactly in the same words* [the italics are his own] the written inscription, short as it is, which they tell us was put over Christ when he was crucified; and, besides this, Mark

says he was crucified at the third hour (nine in the morning), and John says it was at the sixth hour (twelve at noon).

“The inscription is thus stated in those books:

Matthew, - - - ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’

Mark, - - - - - ‘The King of the Jews.’

Luke, - - - - - ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

John, - - - - - ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’

“We may infer from these circumstances, trivial as they are, that those writers, whoever they were, and in whatever time they lived, were not present at the scene.”*

The inference obviously intended, because it is the only inference that may even seem to be to the purpose, is, that the Evangelists are not credible writers. It has never been maintained that any one of them, except John, was present at the scene. But the inference actually required to invalidate the authenticity of the Gospels is one which no man of sense could think of drawing; namely, that Jesus was not crucified either at the third, or the sixth, or any other hour, and consequently that no inscription whatever was put upon his cross,—this fact being further evinced by the contradictory accounts given of that pretended writing.

* Paine's Age of Reason, Part II.

IN a few pages of an Additional Note to the first volume of "The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels,"* I have endeavored to show that the first two chapters of our present Gospel of Matthew were not the work of that Evangelist. It is with a discussion of the difficulties in these two chapters and in the first two chapters of Luke, that Strauss commences his critical examination of the Gospels. This discussion fills about two hundred pages. He assumes, without argument, that the first two chapters ascribed to Matthew were originally a part of the Gospel which bears his name. Through these pages, and through a hundred more of like character,—as relating to events of which the Apostles had not personal knowledge,†—he prepares his readers for the examination of those narratives concerning the public ministry of Jesus, in which alone, as we believe, is preserved the original testimony of the Apostles, affirming on their own authority the truth of what they related.

The whole argument of Strauss in the first two hundred pages to which I have referred, admits

* Additional Note A, Section V. i.

† Namely, the "Relations between Jesus and John the Baptist," and the "Baptism and Temptation of Jesus."

of being placed in a proper light in a few sentences.

We will admit that the reasoning is fallacious which I have formerly used to prove that the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel are not genuine. We will assume that the narrative contained in them proceeded from the original author of the Gospel, whoever he was. I have formerly not conceded, but maintained, that this narrative contradicts that of Luke; and that circumstances are related in it which are in themselves incredible. Nothing further can be asked by one who denies the authenticity of the Gospels, unless, with Strauss, he deny also the possibility of a miracle,—a denial by which all discussion about the truth of any particular account of a miracle is foreclosed.

Yet this denial is, as we have seen, very early put forward by Strauss as a fundamental position of his work, and is continually reappearing throughout the course of it as a main element of his criticism on the Gospels. If, however, the principle be settled, that a miracle is impossible, there can be no greater waste of time than to argue at length from other considerations against the truth of the narratives of the Evangelists. Some

general solution of the existence and reception of such a mass of fables as they have related is reasonably to be expected, but prolix discussions of these fables, considered individually, may well be dispensed with. One might as profitably spend his time in a minute critical examination of the mythological stories concerning the birth, labors, and death of Hercules, with the purpose of proving the narratives concerning him to be false, by an exhibition of their inconsistencies and improbabilities. These remarks are applicable not merely to the portion of Strauss's work immediately before us, but to his whole attack on the authenticity of the Gospels. As a groundwork for any argument or explanation on this subject, we must assume the possibility of their authenticity, that is, the possibility of a miracle, or, in other words, the possibility that we do not know that God cannot act except conformably to what we call the laws of nature, and the possibility that we are not so acquainted with the counsels of his infinite wisdom and goodness, as to be assured of all which it has been his will to effect.

Having, therefore, as regards the narrative in the first two chapters ascribed to Matthew, conceded everything except the prejudged conclu-

sion, that all the narratives of miraculous events contained in the Gospels are necessarily false,— a conclusion which Strauss assumes before entering into his particular arguments against their truth, and constantly interweaves with his reasoning,— we will now consider what follows from our admissions.

I have formerly maintained it to be highly probable, that Matthew, as an Apostle, must have been aware of the errors of the narrative contained in these first two chapters.* If, as I have supposed, the historical evidence concerning these chapters leads us to doubt their genuineness, then the argument that their contents are not such as we might expect from an Apostle, may be of decisive weight. But we now assume that these chapters were originally a part of the Gospel ascribed to Matthew, and this argument *alone* is, as I am about to show, of no weight to invalidate the historical evidence that has been adduced to prove that this Gospel was his work.

In the supposed case that the two chapters are genuine, the following considerations at once present themselves.— We know nothing of the per-

* *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, Vol. I. p. lviii, seqq.

sonal history of Matthew after the death of our Lord. We do not know how long he remained in the society of the other Apostles, or how much he was separated from them. If he remained in their society, we have no reason to think that the facts respecting the birth of our Lord were a common topic of conversation among them. However improbable, therefore, it may be, that as an Apostle he would be very incorrectly informed respecting these facts, yet this is an improbability which cannot be opposed to the proof that the Gospel ascribed to him was his work; and we are now arguing on the supposition that the two chapters were originally a part of it.

It appears, then, on this supposition, that Matthew adopted and embodied in his Gospel a false narration of circumstances connected with the birth and infancy of our Lord. What follows from this? We had no reason before to suppose that he was well qualified as an historical critic to decide on the truth or falsehood of a narrative. He was originally of a class looked upon by his countrymen as degraded, a Jewish tax-gatherer in the service of the Roman government. With his Gospel before us, we cannot suppose him to have had any literary culture; and we have no authentic account

of his having in any way distinguished himself, except by its composition, after becoming an Apostle. He had no personal knowledge concerning the supposed events narrated in the first two chapters, and was writing about sixty years after their occurrence. Under these circumstances, he adopted an erroneous narrative of those events. He adopted, I say, this narrative; for no one can believe that, sixty years after the birth of Jesus, the Evangelist wrote from his own imagination a fabulous account of circumstances attending and following that event,—an account which, having never before been heard of, would be regarded by his readers with equal astonishment and incredulity. The narrative must have been reported and believed previously to his incorporating it in his Gospel.

But if it was believed by others, what is there in the fact that it was believed by Matthew which may change, in any considerable degree, our opinion of him as a writer? Or, rather, to state the only question really at issue, What is there in this fact to invalidate in any degree his testimony to what he relates as of his own knowledge,—the miracles and the teaching of our Lord? Nothing whatever. On the contrary, the striking difference

between the first two chapters and that portion of the Gospel which relates to the public ministry of Jesus is alone sufficient to create a strong presumption, that, in the one case, we have an erroneous tradition, and, in the other, authentic testimony. It is not necessary to our argument, but it should be remembered, that the events to which the Evangelist testifies in his own person are confirmed by the irresistible evidence of phenomena which could not have existed without those events as their cause.

Reasoning of a similar kind may be applied to the case of Luke; and every reader can make for himself the necessary modifications in so applying it. The main point to be attended to is, that the errors of either Evangelist (on the supposition that the errors of the first two chapters are to be ascribed to Matthew) do not disqualify him from being a reliable witness to the truth of the miracles of Jesus.

Nor do either those errors, or the inconsistencies between the two narratives, discredit the main fact which lies at the foundation of both,—the miraculous birth of our Lord. So far from this, the only plausible solution of the existence of two such discordant narratives, at so early a period, is,

that the main fact is true. Supposing the whole story of the miraculous birth of our Lord to be a fiction, this fiction must have had a primitive form. The principal fact must have been related with some detail of circumstances represented as having been connected with it. The primitive fiction, if it obtained currency, may have been added to or altered in the process of tradition. But, if we assume that the original story respecting the birth of our Lord was a fable, derived, as it must have been, from the invention of some individual, and put into circulation by him, it is hardly credible that another individual, equally without any basis of truth on which to rest, should have devised another fable irreconcilable with the former. On the other hand, it might be expected beforehand, that such an event as the miraculous birth of our Lord, the facts concerning which were known to so few individuals, should, in the lapse of time, be enveloped in many fabulous circumstances. The narratives of no events are so likely to be altered, in passing through the mouths of different reporters, as those of miraculous events; and the fact that the accounts of the miracles of Jesus, as related in the Gospels, are so free from any traces of having been adulterated by tradition,

is one of the strongest internal proofs of the genuineness and authenticity of those books.

In examining the Gospels, after the manner of Strauss, for the purpose of discovering whether they afford internal evidence destructive of their credibility, we must keep distinctly in mind the only question to be settled. Putting out of view the notion of the impossibility of a miracle, (which, as I have said, precludes all argument on the subject,) the only question to be settled is this : Do, or do not, the Gospels present such appearances as to make it evident, or to create a presumption, that their writers were not well-informed and trustworthy witnesses respecting the events of the public ministry of Jesus ?

When this question is distinctly apprehended, the discussion is greatly contracted. It will relate only to their genuineness, not to their essential authenticity. It appears that, without further examination, a very large portion of such criticisms as are found in works like that of Strauss may at once be laid out of consideration, as having no bearing upon it. But this question has been confounded with another altogether different,—whether the narratives contained in the Gospels

are free from error. The affirmative of this question is not to be maintained. But no intelligent and well-informed man will suppose that the existence of such errors and inconsistencies as may be found in those narratives tends to invalidate the essential authenticity of the Gospels,— their authenticity in the only sense in which we use the term concerning any history, the general truth of which is undoubted.

WE pass to another consideration.—If the Gospels are the works of eyewitnesses or of well-informed contemporaries, the mythical theory of Strauss, as he himself recognizes, is wholly excluded; and so, likewise, is every other theory which denies the miraculous origin of our religion, excepting that theory, if such a theory may be considered as existing, which refers its origin to what may be called the pseudo-miracle of the success of pure falsehood. It is, therefore, the main immediate object of Strauss's work to prove that the Gospels are not genuine, by showing that they contain accounts which could not have proceeded from well-informed narrators.

But in respect to the ultimate purpose of Strauss, namely, to disprove the truth of our religion, the

conclusion arrived at by him, that the Gospels are not genuine, at once deprives his criticisms on those books of any weight, and invalidates all his arguments against Christianity, except, indeed, that argument which consists in the denial of the possibility of a miracle. His reasoning is self-destructive.

Let us admit that the Gospels are not genuine, that they are productions of the second century, founded on previous imperfect, written narratives, or on oral traditions, or on both. This, I think, it has been formerly shown, could not have been the fact;* but we will now reason on the supposition that it was so. Upon this supposition, then, that they are productions of the second century, what character might we expect them to have consistently with the truth of Christianity, that is, consistently with the truth of the essential facts concerning the miraculous office, the character, acts, teaching, death, and resurrection of Christ? Let an objector, who does not assume that a miracle is impossible, magnify at his will the discrepancies among them, or what he regards as the intrinsic improbabilities in their accounts of par-

* See Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels, I. 168, seqq.

ticular events, yet no one, acquainted with the nature of human testimony,—especially with what must be its nature in relation to facts so marvellous and unparalleled, when passing through a series of reporters,—will imagine that there could be fewer discrepancies and improbabilities than exist in the narratives of the life of Jesus, if these narratives were written in the second century, on however firm a basis they might rest of essential truth. Establish the position that the Gospels were not written by those to whom they have been ascribed, and the whole body of criticisms upon them, such as are brought forward by writers like Strauss, becomes utterly irrelevant and futile as regards the truth of Christianity. Supposing the truth of our religion, if the histories of Jesus which we now possess were not written till the second century, it would be altogether unreasonable to expect that they would be exposed to fewer objections than Strauss has urged against them.

If we prove the genuineness of the Gospels, we prove the truth of Christianity; but, on the other hand, to disprove the genuineness of the Gospels, were that possible, would not be to advance a step toward disproving its truth. It is evident, however, that the mistake has commonly been com-

mitted by unbelievers of supposing that such would be the case, and that this error has been acquiesced in by many believers. But in order to disprove the truth, or, in other words, the miraculous origin, of our religion, it is necessary to show that all those facts in the history of the world which imply its miraculous origin as their cause never existed, or that some other sufficient solution may be given of their existence.

The case may be thus stated. If the Gospels are, as we believe, the works of Apostles and of companions of Apostles, the question of the essential truth of their narratives is decided. If they are, as Strauss and many other German theologians have contended, the compilations of anonymous individuals in the second century, full of errors, — as, in that case, we might reasonably expect, — then neither their late compilation nor the existence of those errors can invalidate the decisive evidences of the miraculous origin of our religion still to be derived from them, and to be derived from other sources beside that particular one which we now believe to exist, namely, the testimony of trustworthy witnesses of the ministry of our Lord, given either by themselves or by those to whom they had directly communicated their knowledge, under cir-

cumstances which preclude the notion of essential error or of intentional deception as an incredible absurdity. And it is to be observed, that among the phenomena which, on this supposition, would evince the miraculous origin of Christianity, would be the compilation of such histories of Christ in the second century. If the Gospels had not appeared till this time, they would undoubtedly be far less correct narratives than they are ; they would have been full of traditional fables. But it may well be doubted, whether the evidence of the truth of our religion would be weakened. The existence of such a representation of the character and ministry of Christ in the Gentile world, found in the second century, in certain books, to be ascribed to anonymous Jewish writers, would be, to say the least, as difficult to account for, on any other supposition than that of its essential truth, as the existence of such a representation in the Gospels considered as genuine.

THE work of Strauss has obtained celebrity, and produced an effect, probably much disproportioned to the number of its readers ; for, in the present state of theological literature and inquiry, it cannot be supposed that the readers of so long a work of

such a character have been numerous, at least out of Germany. But it has furnished a pretence for infidelity, by being a very long, and what has been reputed an elaborate and learned, work in its defence; and the very circumstance that its actual contents were little known has undoubtedly magnified the notion of their importance. The direct effect which it may have produced on some minds by the views which it presents, is to be ascribed to various causes. The fact that there are errors in the Gospels is confounded throughout with the conclusion that the writers are not credible witnesses. The doctrine of the impossibility of a miracle is constantly kept in view, to determine all questions against the truth of the Gospels. The opinions of the Rationalists (so called) of the school of Paulus, who resolve all miracles into erroneous accounts of natural events, are produced in detail by the author in his criticisms on many passages, and are triumphantly confuted; and so, too, are opinions which he ascribes to some defenders of Christianity among his countrymen: and this may give an impression of his power of reasoning that will unduly affect the judgment of certain readers. His untiring prolixity may weary others into a belief that there is some force in what

he says. But perhaps the main direct effect produced by his work has resulted from its treating all those facts in which our happiness and virtue are most interested,—those facts which address themselves to our noblest sympathies and sentiments, which, even if they were divested of reality, would remain the most glorious of imaginations,—from its treating those facts in the driest manner, on the narrowest basis of thought, and with a heartless disregard of the associations connected with them in the mind of a religious man, and of the bearing of the discussion on the essential interests of humanity. This is the characteristic tone of his book ; and it may be difficult for one who undertakes the task of reading it through to escape the infection of it. There is danger that his feelings may be so degraded, his views so contracted, and, I may add, his reasoning powers so confused, as to leave his mind in a proper state for the reception of German mysticism and infidelity. If one were to submit to hear the character and conduct of his most intimate friend canvassed and questioned at great length, in the manner in which Strauss discusses the history of our Lord, he might find it difficult to feel for him the same confidence and respect as before.

CHAPTER IV.

ON SOME IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GOSPELS.

BEFORE leaving the subject of the criticism of the Gospels, we will advert to some general facts concerning them, which should be kept in mind by him who would read them intelligently.

I have repeatedly had occasion to speak of, or to refer to, their character. As literary compositions they are among the most imperfect of histories. Either individually or collectively, they present only a brief narrative of some of the most striking events in our Lord's ministry, and these told by the writers, with the exception of John, for the most part nakedly and in few words. John's narratives of particular events form an exception to this remark; but the incompleteness of his history, taken as a whole, is even more remarkable than that of the other Gospels. No skill is shown by any one of the Evangelists in connecting his relations together, so as to form a proper con-

tinuous history, however brief. No explanations are given, except a few which are parenthetical and unimportant. With the exception of some passages in John's Gospel, there is no comment on anything told which discovers the writer's feelings or state of mind. It is with astonishment that we recognize the fact, when our attention is directed to it, that a writer wholly uninterested in the events related could not have recorded them more dryly than do the first three Evangelists ; — that the whole effect on our minds of what is told is due to its intrinsic character. I may turn aside for a moment to observe, that, among the overwhelming evidences of the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels, this is one among the many of those which we may speak of as the most decisive. Such works could not have been written with the purpose of deception ; — but the notion of intentional deception in their writers is now, I suppose, universally regarded as foolish and obsolete. It is equally clear that they could not have been written by weak-minded and fanatical individuals, whose imaginations had been strongly excited by some extraordinary delusion. No writings can present a stronger contrast than do the Gospels to what might be expected from fanatics.

As I have said, the Gospels are not proper histories. They are very far from being such works as might furnish an intelligible and satisfactory account of the ministry of Jesus, of its character and purpose, to one previously unacquainted with the essential facts concerning it.

Let us imagine them to be put without explanation into the hands of a very intelligent heathen contemporary of their authors, but one as imperfectly informed as were the generality of Heathens of the condition and history of the Jewish nation, and having only those imperfect notions and that hesitating belief of the great truths of religion which appear even in the writings of Cicero. Supposing him to read them through with attention, what ideas of their meaning and bearing would he have been able to form, corresponding to those of an enlightened Christian? The conceptions of the character and purpose of the ministry of Christ, entertained by different Christians of the present day, are very unlike one another; and if our own be correct, they must be the result of much thought and reasoning, and derived in part directly and in part by clear inference from many other sources of information beside the Gospels,—especially from the history of the Apostles given by Luke, and the

Epistles of St. Paul. I do not say that every intelligent and rational Christian must for himself have gone through the process requisite to acquire the knowledge necessary in order to understand the Gospels; but if he have not done so, he must be indebted for it to the labors of others.

The Gospels imply throughout, that the great outlines of the ministry of Jesus, together with the condition and character of the Jews among whom he appeared, and the more striking immediate results of what he did and taught, were already known to their readers. They suppose, in like manner, their readers to be already acquainted with many circumstances attending particular events and discourses of our Lord, which circumstances are not brought into view in their narratives. A knowledge of circumstances which the Evangelists do not directly state is, as I have said, the main key to the understanding of the character and bearing of what they relate,—the great source of illustration for the Gospels.

I will give a single example of the manner in which the Evangelists relied on the previous knowledge of their readers, or rather, as one may say, of their unconscious assumption of the existence of such knowledge. The example is, perhaps,

the more striking, because there is no process, such as exists in so many other cases, by which we can now recover the information not given by them, and apply it to the completion or illustration of their narratives.

There are at least seven different appearances of our Lord after his resurrection related in the Gospels. Two others, occurring before his ascension, are mentioned by St. Paul. And Luke, in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, says that, "after he suffered, he gave many certain proofs to his Apostles that he was living, being seen by them during the course of forty days, and teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God."

Yet, in relation to this subject, the Gospels afford no answer to questions which at once arise in our minds. What was our Lord's mode of life during the interval between his resurrection and his ascension ? Whither did he retire when he separated from his disciples ? These, indeed, are questions which the Evangelists might not have been able to answer. But there are others, in respect to which, had they anticipated the curiosity of readers of after-times, they would have been able to satisfy it. After his several appearances to his disciples, in what manner did he leave them ?

Why did none of them attempt to follow him ? At least, in regard to the circumstances attending his departure after his various interviews with them, they could have given us satisfactory information. But, with the exception of the fact, that at his last interview he was separated from them by his ascension, there is nothing in their narratives which throws any light on the subject.

What follows from all this ? It follows, that, in the narratives of the Evangelists concerning the appearances of our Lord, we have not all that was originally told. The circumstances which the Apostles and other immediate disciples of our Lord could not but know, but which are not related in the Gospels, must have been matters of curiosity and interest to their early converts ; and it would be idle to suppose that they withheld that information concerning them which they were able to give.

It may here be observed, that the supposition that the accounts of the appearances given by the Evangelists are not true, is altogether set aside by the unfinished form in which they appear. No fabricated stories, whether the product of intentional deception, or of a self-deluding imagination working on traditional stories, would have been

left in such a state of unsatisfactory incompleteness.

But if the Gospels are not regular histories,—if the Evangelists assumed that their readers already possessed a knowledge of the main facts respecting our Lord's ministry, and even of particular circumstances in his history,—what, then, is their character? For what purpose were they written? The answer I conceive to be this. Such a series of events as constituted and accompanied the ministry of Jesus could not have taken place without giving rise to a great number of reports, false as well as true. Its true history was given by the Apostles and their associates, but their converts had heard, or were exposed to hear, much that was not true,—falsehoods proceeding from the enemies of Jesus, and misstatements and fables having their origin among his ill-informed followers. In this state of things it became necessary from these numerous relations to separate, to collect together, and to authenticate by the highest authority, a portion at least of those more important facts which determined that his ministry was from God, and afforded the most striking illustrations of its character. This was done by the Evangelists. Every one of them, I believe, might

have explained his purpose in language corresponding to that used by Luke (i. 4): “I have written, . . . that you may know the truth concerning the relations which you have heard”;* or might have adopted the words of John (xx. 30, 31): “Many other miracles, indeed, did Jesus perform before his disciples, which have not been written in this book; but these have been written, that you may believe Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God; and that, believing, you may have life through him.”

THUS, as I conceive, it is to the circumstances under which the Gospels were written, and which led to their composition, that they owe, in part, their imperfect and fragmentary character; but this is due in great part, also, to the want of skill in the Evangelists as literary artists.

In regard to the criticism of the Gospels, it is constantly to be kept in mind, that this want of literary skill in their authors appears not merely in the construction of their histories, but equally in their use of language. Their vocabulary was

* Such I conceive to be the meaning of the original. See *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, Vol. I. pp. clxxi, clxxii, note.

very limited, and hence the action of their minds was constrained. They had no command and choice of expression, and, at the same time, were called upon to communicate ideas, sentiments, and modes of thought, with which the generality of their contemporaries had been wholly unacquainted. The difficulty they found in writing caused them to narrate briefly and imperfectly, omitting connecting thoughts and explanatory circumstances ; and their want of familiarity with the use of language not unfrequently led them to employ forms of speech which are evidently not the precise logical expression of the meaning intended.

THE Gospels, then, in their construction and in their style, correspond throughout to the character and circumstances of the writers to whom they are ascribed. They bear with them indelible proofs of their genuineness.

BUT it is obvious that books of the character described must be very open to the attacks of minute criticism, and exposed to many cavils in which there is no weight. A story when told by one imperfectly skilled in the art of narration often suggests objections, and presents seeming improb-

abilities, which may be easily removed by explanation. Every one must have observed how, in such a case, what at first appeared obscure or doubtful is at once cleared up by the answers to a few questions ; or how even the statement of a single circumstance, with which we were before unacquainted, may throw light on all that perplexed us. But as we cannot interrogate the Evangelists, we must, as regards them, answer our questions ourselves ; and our answers are to be derived, as I have before explained, from a wide range of knowledge and of thought.

In proportion as we have more just conceptions of the character and condition of the Evangelists, and are better acquainted with the state of things under which they wrote, so will difficulties and obscurities disappear, and their writings become clear to us. In proportion as one is deficient in this requisite knowledge, or in the comprehension and judgment necessary to make use of it, or in the disposition to apply it, so will he be able to raise cavils and objections.

If the Gospels be of such a character as I have described, they must present many difficulties. I do not here mean by that word passages affording any well-founded objection to their authenticity,

but passages requiring to be explained for the generality of readers. In all ancient classical histories, and in the other writings which have come down to us from Greece and Rome, there are many such difficulties. The explanation of them has given occasion to that vast body of direct and indirect commentaries on these writings, which includes all those books which treat of the Greek and Roman antiquities, language, literature, and philosophy.

But beside the difficulties in the Gospels, of the nature just represented, there are, as in all other histories, errors,—misapprehensions of the meaning of language, and mistakes in regard to facts. But as difficulties of the former class are, from the character of the Gospels, more likely to occur in them than in most ancient histories, so, on the other hand, we believe that important difficulties of the latter class, or, in other words, important errors concerning the history of our Lord's public ministry, are less likely to occur, because, in relation to the facts of this history, we believe the Evangelists to have been well-informed and thoroughly honest relators.

THE character of the Gospels, such as it has been represented, is one mode in which it has pleased God to preserve to us, in the very books

themselves, evidence of their authenticity. It appears, that, in order to understand them, we must be acquainted with many facts which they do not state; that we must bring to bear on their explanation many considerations which they do not expressly present. Parallel with what the Evangelists relate, there existed a state of things which they do not bring into view. Results not narrated by them must have been consequent on what they do narrate. Circumstances which they have not placed before us must have given occasion to much that was said and done by our Lord, and must have affected, throughout, the course of his ministry. Of the histories which they have written, there is an unwritten counterpart. Between the two there is such correspondence, that, in order to understand what is written, we must make a study of the unwritten. This correspondence becomes more striking in proportion to the correctness and clearness of our apprehension of that state of things which was coexistent with the events recorded in the Gospels. The relations between what is told and what is not told become more apparent. All the knowledge which we can bring to bear on the history of Jesus as given by the Evangelists, goes to confirm its essential truth. The case would be

the very reverse, if this history were false. Then, in prosecuting our inquiries, instead of continually discovering new proofs of its authenticity, we should continually discover new proofs of its falsehood. Nothing but truth could bear the test which we have it in our power to apply. Such is the character of the Gospels, such is their deficiency of information, their imperfection and incompleteness, that they are necessarily complicated with a great body of circumstantial evidence of the most unsuspicious kind. Thus, what we might consider as their defects, what are their defects when regarded merely as literary compositions, contribute greatly to enhance their value.

BUT this, one may say, is not the view of the Gospels commonly given.—It is not. It is inconsistent with the view of their character presented by any established church, or by any writer holding the traditional opinions concerning them, whether more or less distinctly. It is altogether inconsistent with the neglected state in which the Gospels have been left for popular use,—for the use of all who are not theological scholars. Through this neglect, we who speak the English language now read them in a translation in which

their meaning is often mistaken, and often, when not absolutely misunderstood, improperly expressed, — in which the great simplicity of the Evangelists (one of the most decisive marks of their truth) is disguised by a stiff and solemn style, as much as the Evangelists themselves would have been disguised, if, putting off the dress of their times, they had clothed themselves in the vestments of a modern priest; — in a translation of which the phraseology is in part antiquated, and in part such as was equally improper in former days as at present, and which, in aiming at a verbal rendering, retains what are mere idioms of the original language, without force or propriety in our own. Even the mechanical aid to a right understanding of the Gospels to be derived from a proper division of their contents in printing, so as to separate from one another those portions which relate to different topics or different occasions, is not afforded in the copies published by authority. On the contrary, the divisions made are such as not to guide, but to mislead, the unlearned and inattentive reader. Were all this reformed, a veil would be removed which now obscures and distorts their meaning.

The same causes — whatever they are — which

have operated to deprive the great majority of the Christian community in every country of that means of understanding the Gospels which would be afforded by a translation corresponding to the original as nearly as the difference of languages permits, have presented an equal obstacle to communicating to the generality of readers correct notions of their character, and of the manner in which they ought to be regarded. The action of these causes has kept back from popular use a knowledge of the true character of the Gospels, and of that great variety of facts and considerations by which they are illustrated and their truth confirmed. It is true, that, from the vast number of works which directly or indirectly relate to the Gospels, a great amount of important information, and very many explanations and suggestions, are to be derived by the theological student. But the most important of these works require so much preparatory knowledge in order that they may be used at all, or used with advantage, many of them have so repulsive a character, and most of them are founded on such false conceptions of Christianity and of the Gospels, that, as regards the generality of Christians, all inquiry is discouraged, or, if pursued, there is danger of its becoming unprofitable, if not worse than unprofitable.

The general want of that information concerning the Gospels which ought to be the common property of Christians, has caused the whole subject of our religion to be involved in obscurity, perplexity, and error. This ignorance has not been confined to the laity,— who have commonly been regarded as excused from any study of the character or the evidences of their professed or nominal faith,— but has likewise extended over a very large portion of those who have assumed to be teachers of Christianity. The faith of the generality of men has rested on traditionary authority. Beside the influence of this authority, the weight of the external evidences of Christianity, the essential principles of its morality, based on the immortal nature of man, and the intrinsic character of the Gospels, which cannot be wholly obscured, have undoubtedly made many men Christians, but often with a wavering faith, and with very imperfect or very erroneous conceptions of Christianity. But, on the other hand, the neglect, or the inability, or the unwillingness, to communicate that knowledge to the great body of Christians which would place the history of our religion in clear day, but would at the same time place in as broad a light the superstitions and false doctrines

that have been represented as essential to Christianity, has left the misunderstood Gospels exposed defenceless to the attacks of unbelievers. If those truths concerning them which may be clearly established were generally known and recognized, works like that of Strauss could hardly be produced. If produced, they would fall at once to their proper level. They would be classed with such writings as those of one of his countrymen (Professor Samuel Simon Witte), who, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, maintained that the Pyramids and the ruins of Persepolis, Palmyra, and Baalbec were natural productions, the result of volcanic agency.

It is by the prevailing ignorance of which I have spoken, and by the inveterate errors which have come down to us from ages more ignorant than our own, and the consequent outbreak of modern extravagances occasioned by the free action of men's minds having been so long constrained, that he who would explain the character, and make evident the divine origin of Christianity, is principally embarrassed. Undoubtedly, among those, throughout the small body of theological scholars, who have given their thoughts to the study of our faith, there has been a great advance in religious

knowledge, and consequently in correct conceptions of Christianity, since the beginning of the last century. In going back from century to century, to an era preceding the Protestant Reformation, we find the same gradual change for the better. This is ground for encouragement, and for the hope of a brighter period. Were it not for this retrospect of the past, the view before us and around us would be gloomy. When we see the vast power of prejudice opposed to the truth,—the sacred authority with which antiquated errors are invested,—the obstinacy with which the dead formulæ of barbarous creeds, the leavings of mortality and decay, are still set forth, like the relics of a Catholic saint, as having power to give health and life,—and the strong influence acting on the love of wealth and rank which determines or affects the professed belief of a great number of men, even of the public teachers of religion, in the Christian world;—when we look at the state of things existing in the established church of one of the most enlightened Christian nations, a nation so intimately connected with our own,—we might well feel disengaged, were it not for

“the deep voice from the past,
Which tells us these things cannot last.”

I LEAVE the preceding paragraph as it was originally written. But since it was written, the news has burst upon us of that almost simultaneous development of moral force that has been for a long time accumulating, which is now rapidly and irrevocably changing the aspect of Europe. It has become evident, that, throughout the more enlightened portion of the Old World, traditional institutions and obsolete creeds, unsuited to the present age, must fall. The prejudices on which they have rested are decayed, and have grown too weak for their support. They must fall, if not before the reason, yet before the passions and the altered feelings, of those on whom they have been imposed; and the same abuses and errors cannot be restored. The struggle which has commenced, sudden as may seem its first outbreak, has been preparing through many years by the progress of men's thoughts and convictions. It may be obstinate and long, many mistakes may be committed, much folly, much wickedness, and much suffering may accompany it; but, whatever doubts there may be of its final result as regards the happiness of our race, there is no doubt that it will sweep away many evils by which civilized Europe has been afflicted, and into which a new vitality can-

not hereafter be infused. This struggle is not the commencement of a series of events corresponding to those which the last sixty years have witnessed. Men are starting anew from a more advanced state of intellectual and moral culture. Their physical condition has also been improved. The wants and sufferings of the less favored portion of our race have been gaining more and more attention from those to whom the power to alleviate them has been afforded by the providence of God manifested in the necessary order of things which he has established in this world and by which men are bound together. The ferocious passions of the many have not been maddened as they had been sixty years ago by direct and open oppression, habitual injury and contempt; nor has the intellect of the more enlightened been insulted and exasperated through the imposition of absurd creeds, and the maintenance of intolerable abuses, under the name of religion. We cannot doubt that the aged survivors of the next half-century will have witnessed changes as great and as startling as those which have stamped their character on the period through which we have just passed, but changes of another kind. Men will not again run the same cycle. There seems to be no ground

for fear or for hope, should any be disposed to entertain such hope, that a new reaction will take place strong enough to carry men back to the same causes of evil from which they are now struggling to free themselves.

But this anticipation of coming changes affords in itself alone no augury of good. The restlessness and the convulsions of nations are in themselves no more favorable indications of improvement than the tossings and spasmodic motions of a man in a fever are symptoms of returning health. It is with nations as with the individuals of whom they are composed. It is only through means which may raise the moral and intellectual character of men, that their permanent good may be effected. It can be effected only through the influence of those principles of action which control our selfishness, and call forth our social affections;—only through a better knowledge and a deeper feeling of the truths which concern our relations to our fellow-men as founded on our relations to God and to immortality, and which lead us by the highest motives to the performance of our duties.

When, accordingly, we reflect, I do not say on the passions, but on the motives to action, which

govern the majority of men ; on the virtual irreligion which is prevalent even under the profession of religion ; on the merely outward and ceremonious respect for some established form of national worship ; on the wild speculations which appear in the writings of so many, who, from their political station or their great intellectual powers, control directly or indirectly the minds of their fellow-men ; on the infidelity and atheism, made only the more offensive by pretending to use the language of religion, which have found favor in our age as the highest philosophy ; on the general absence of a recognition of the influence of men's opinions and religious belief in determining their character and conduct, and, in consequence of this, the general insensibility to the value of truth and to the mischief of error on the most important topics of thought, or, in other words, the common indifference as to what is essentially true or essentially false concerning Christianity ; — when we consider these things, we may perceive that other influences, very unlike those which are now agitating the surface of society, influences working far deeper in the nature of man, are required to produce any great and permanent good for our race. We may hope, — we may believe, — that the pres-

ent state of things is preparing the way for the more unobstructed action of these influences at some distant period. Christianity, though misunderstood and misrepresented, neglected and calumniated, has been the great civilizer of the world; and it is to Christianity better understood than it has been, that we must continue to look for all essential improvement in the character and condition of individuals, and consequently of nations.

CHAPTER V.

ON WHAT ESSENTIALLY CONSTITUTES THE VALUE OF CHRISTIANITY AND OF THE GOSPELS.

I HAVE spoken in the last Chapter of some of the characteristics of the Gospels. One requisite necessary to complete our view of their character — one requisite the most important — remains to be mentioned. We must have a correct apprehension of what essentially constitutes their value; and to this end we must have a correct apprehension of what essentially constitutes the value of Christianity.

The Gospels are the history of a miraculous communication from God to men. If this history be true, it relates to an event of inconceivable interest and importance. The Infinite Being has suspended the ordinary operations of his power to manifest himself more immediately to the dwellers on earth. The essential value of Christianity consists in its being such a revelation of Him. When

we inquire respecting the truth of Christianity, the only question at issue is, whether it be a fact, that God, through Christ, miraculously revealed himself to men. Let us consider why this fact is so important.

One answer is obvious. If God has thus revealed his existence and his purposes towards us, the truths of religion rest on an immovable basis, — the witness of God himself. This needs no illustration. But there is another answer, which has been less considered. It is only through such a supernatural manifestation of God that these truths can be known. This admits of explanation.

In proof of the proposition just stated, we need not appeal to the ignorance, the errors, the uncertainty, and the very limited conceptions of the wisest of heathen philosophers. We will put aside the whole of that decisive evidence to be derived from our knowledge of the condition of men unenlightened by Christianity. We may consider the proposition in the abstract, not referring to what experience has determined concerning it, but regarding directly the actual powers of the human mind, and what in the nature of things must be true.

What can human reason alone, when strongest and most unembarrassed in its action, effect toward establishing the facts on which religion is founded ? Our reason may assure us of the truth that there is an infinite cause of all finite things. All experience teaches us that every thing finite, all motion, all organized life, all changes, must have a cause for their existence. We have no experience, and therefore we have no belief, that a body of what we call matter can come into existence uncreated. The weight of this universal experience is so decisive, that the conviction derived from it has been commonly regarded as an innate law of the mind. But the truth that finite things cannot exist without a cause, leads us directly to the conclusion that there is an Infinite Being, who is the cause of all finite things,—the Creator of the Universe.

What indications, then, do our very brief experience, and our most imperfect knowledge of the objects around us, and of the state of things in which we are existing, afford us of the character of the Cause of all things ? The phenomena we are able to observe, the series of what we call causes and effects, may satisfy our reason of his intelligence and benevolence. Our conclusion in regard to the moral character of God is confirmed

by the fact, that we neither know, nor can conceive of, any cause of moral evil except the selfish desires of finite beings. These indeed have been ascribed to the Deity in those false systems of theology which represent him as having created the universe for his own glory. But we are not speaking of what superstition has taught, but of what our reason, unassisted by revelation, may be conceived of as capable of teaching.

The Infinite Being, then, is intelligent and benevolent. But we can imagine no limitation to the essential attributes of such a being. We conceive, therefore, that his intelligence and benevolence are infinite, in the whole extent of the meaning of that term which we are able to comprehend.

Furthermore. This Being we can conceive of only as unchangeable. The Source of all power can be affected by no power from without. No new motive of action derived from temporal and finite things can influence Him who is the Author of all things temporal and finite, and to whose infinite intelligence they have ever been present.

Thus we have arrived at a conception, of the truth of which I believe that it is possible for our reason alone to give us assurance. But I here

use the word “possible” to denote merely that which may be supposed without supposing what in the nature of things is an absurdity. There is no evidence that such a conception of God has been entertained by the wisest of men unenlightened by Christianity, though it is not to be questioned that a few such men have made some approach towards it.

To this conclusion, then, our reason may have attained. But before this conclusion she stands utterly confounded. She has arrived at a conception which she cannot comprehend. Putting aside all our imperfect and contradictory notions of infinity and eternity,* and of an Unchangeable Being whose successive volitions cause all changes, notions which she has no power to reconcile, other questions at once present themselves which she cannot answer,—difficulties which she cannot solve. She has risen into an immeasurable expanse of light, in which all sensible things melt away into mere manifestations of the Infinite Spirit; but it is an expanse of light by which she is overwhelmed and bewildered. No power of

* See *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, Vol. II. p. excvii, seq.

distinct vision remains. No countenance manifests itself to her from the unfathomable glory. No articulate voice issues forth. The light is mute.

In contemplating the relations of God to finite beings, our reason, when untaught and unguided by God himself, utterly fails us. In attempting to explore this subject, she proceeds stumbling, uncertain, disheartened, meeting on every side with barriers which she cannot pass. God is infinitely benevolent. Why, then, one may ask, am I a suffering being in a world full of suffering, where moral and physical evils often present themselves in forms so appalling? — God is infinitely benevolent. Of this we are assured. But numberless beings are but just beginning to exist. Numberless inferior animals around us have been formed with but very limited capacities of happiness, if happiness it may be called. There are to our perceptions immeasurable voids in the universe, containing no created life. Why have not all time and space been filled with happy beings? — God is an agent. This is certain. His power is in continual action, forming, sustaining, and moving all things. But we can conceive of no action of any conscious being without a motive.

And we can conceive of no motive which does not consist in the purpose of improving one's condition through the gratification of some unsatisfied desire. And no such motive can be ascribed to the Infinite Being.—God is the source of all power; he has formed our natures; he has formed and disposed all things that act upon them. How is it, that I am not merely a passive instrument in his hands? How is it, that there is inseparably connected with my nature a conviction that I can act for myself, that I can choose good and avoid evil, and that the consequent sense of responsibility becomes a source of unhappiness and misery, when I feel that I have chosen ill? In what respect does the uncontrollable power of God differ from an inexorable Fate, consigning, if not myself, yet many of my fellow-creatures, to sin and misery? Certainly the difference is not to be established through such expedients as are resorted to by those who maintain that this uncontrollable power, the ultimate cause of all finite things, is indeed inconsistent with the moral power of man to choose between good and evil. But how are these things to be explained and reconciled?

These difficulties, more or less clearly perceived, have in all times, and more particularly in our

own, spread the darkness of atheism over what has been called philosophy ; — for, at the present day, the belief that no such doctrine as atheism exists can be held only by a very ill-informed and very innocent person. I have stated these difficulties that the subject may be fully apprehended ; so that he who thus apprehends it may not be taken unawares, when he finds them put forth by others, or when they rise spontaneously before his own mind. I have stated them for another purpose, that we may fully recognize what ought to be recognized as a fundamental principle by all who undertake to speculate on the highest truths, the truths of religion,— that man's reason is very limited. All that by its unassisted exercise we know or can know concerning the condition of God's creatures in this world, or his relations to his creatures generally or to the universe, bears a far less proportion to what, in our present state, we cannot thus know, than do the objects which we may discern by the light of a taper in a narrow room to what we may behold when the midnight sky opens above us, with its numberless worlds of light spreading through the immeasurable and unimaginable distance. With this just, and consequently most humble, view of our native powers, we shall

form a proper estimate of those pretended systems of the highest philosophy, which, rejecting all that God has revealed to us, and renouncing even the clearest deductions of our own reason concerning his being and perfections, have been in reality incoherent and unintelligible dreams of human folly.

But all the difficulties and questions which I have spoken of, or to which I have alluded, resolve themselves into one great question of the deepest interest to us all. What are the relations of the Infinite Spirit to each one of us individually? Is it possible that they can be of such a character, that, in the imperfect language to the use of which we are compelled, in speaking of God, by our inadequate conceptions, we may call them *personal* relations? Happiness flows forth from Him; nor can we reasonably ascribe any other purpose than the production of happiness to the Author of all things. But is my happiness as an individual his care,—the care of that Being on whom I am wholly dependent? I have been but just introduced by him among his works. If God regards me with benevolence, and his benevolence is infinite, why was not my being commensurate with his own? And why am I, in this my short life here, exposed to so much suffering?

We speak of the love of God for his creatures. But I have no experience of love except that of one finite being for another. My natural powers enable me to form no conception of any other. I love because there exist in the objects of my love qualities with which I can sympathize and the contemplation of which gives me pleasure, or from the gratification afforded by the exercise of the amiable and benevolent affections, by the performance of those acts to which they lead, and by the reciprocal love which they produce. I love because I find my happiness in the happiness of others, and in their feelings of kindness towards me. But I can attribute no such motives to the Infinite Being. The affections which bind men together cannot be ascribed to him.

I am suffering in a world full of suffering. My imagination, or, if one will, my reason, may put before me the conception of another world in which suffering does not exist. I may not object, that for me to attain to it I must pass through a fearful change; but what assurance can reason alone give me, that I am to exist in that better world? She may teach me that God regards the sum of happiness in the universe; but it is my individual happiness about which I inquire. If another

being is to take my place in that world; or if, according to a doctrine received by many, utterly unintelligible in itself, but which they suppose themselves to understand, my spirit, distinct from my consciousness, is to animate another being,—this will not lessen the sum of happiness in the universe;—but what does that doctrine concern me? Where am I to learn that God cares for me as an individual?

From one source only,—from the testimony of God himself. The answer to that question is given by his supernatural manifestation of himself through Christ. Through him he has addressed men, individual men, as his creatures, as his care, as acting and suffering here under his continual providence, in preparation for an immortal existence.

But in supposing such a revelation, you present, an unbeliever may say, ideas which I cannot comprehend. You bring together in a supposed connection, which is impossible, the infinite and the finite. You blend with the history of human events, of the deeds of men, what you would have regarded as immediate acts of God. You teach that infinite perfection and power were in union with human imperfection and weakness, for the

purpose of accomplishing what you call a divine work. You represent God as dissatisfied with what he had ordained, and interrupting the established course of things in order to amend it. You would have us believe that the Unchangeable Being did so change as to interpose at a particular time in this world of ours, and operate in a manner altogether different from his usual laws of action. My imagination is confounded, and my reason revolts.

I have in what precedes, and elsewhere,* taken notice of the erroneous conceptions on which such language may be founded. But there is a most important truth involved in it. God's miraculous revelation of himself through Christ — of which it has been a fashion with many in our times to speak so foolishly and so flippantly, not professing absolutely to disbelieve it, but only to regard it as a matter of indifference whether God has so revealed himself or not — is in truth the most astonishing fact of which we can conceive, and one of incomparably greater interest to us than any other of which we may assure ourselves. Our imagination may well be overwhelmed by it, but

* See Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels, Vol. II. p. excviii, note.

there is nothing in the belief of it to offend our reason.

Our reason does not hesitate to admit the belief of the all-controlling, uninterrupted agency of God throughout the universe, in all that surrounds us and in ourselves. It assents at once to the truth, that the Infinite Being is everywhere in the most intimate connection with finite things; all finite things being but manifestations of His power, and preserved in existence by Him. Reason embraces, as if it were a deduction of her own, the truth taught by Christianity, that the perfect, all-pervading Spirit of God is continually working in the midst of human imperfection, and (to use the only language which our most limited apprehensions afford) in union with it, for the production of good. To one who acknowledges the existence and agency of God, the fact is evident and admits of no dispute, however impossible we may find it to reconcile the conceptions which it brings together, that the Unchangeable is at every moment operating to produce changes in his works, immeasurably exceeding in number and variety any limit to which our imagination can extend. As regards the supernatural manifestation of God to bring about a new state of things, to accomplish

one of those innumerable changes, reason finds no difficulty in believing that Infinite Power may act without the intervention of those phenomena which we call natural causes. She perceives that the existence of these causes is from him, and that precedent to their existence he must have so acted,—that the work of creation is a miracle. The fact does not seem to have been generally recognized, but the only difficulty which presents itself to our reason in relation to this subject is of an opposite kind. It is in answering the question, why the Ultimate Cause of all things has ordinarily interposed a chain of finite causes, so called, between his power and will, and the effects which it is his purpose to produce.

Our misapprehensions, and incredulity and imperfect belief, concerning God's manifestation of himself through Jesus Christ, arise from our narrow conceptions. We are of the earth, earthly. We find it hard to raise our apprehensions above it. We are in continual danger of thinking and feeling as if we had been here always, and were to remain here for ever. We affect to be philosophers, and to speculate on the constitution of a universe into which we have but just been introduced; but our unaided speculations are drawn downwards

toward the earth, and, for the most part, only carry us into the region of its smoke and exhalations. The objects immediately about us, of which we have known nothing but for a few years, and from which we are so soon to be separated, may press upon us, and engross us, and close round us, and shut out from our view all the marvels and glories of the infinite unknown. We are surrounded by an immeasurable expanse of created things, throughout which the power of God is ever operating; but in our littleness we find it hard to comprehend that God may have manifested himself to men in a mode different from any of which we had had experience.

THE revelation of God has broken through the barrier of clouds that environs us, and has opened to us the light of day beyond. It makes known to us that we have far more important relations than those which belong only to our present existence,—imperishable relations with God, and his yet unknown works. It raises us into another sphere of being. It blends earth with heaven,—connects the finite, powerless sufferer with the all-powerful Source of infinite good, our lives that have but just commenced with eternity, and our world with the universe.

The fact alone that the Infinite Spirit has miraculously revealed himself to men answers that question in which we have so deep an interest,— What are our individual relations to God? It is in its being a miraculous revelation, that the essential, the inestimable value of Christianity consists. An articulate voice has been uttered from the ineffable glory that fills all space. God, in thus speaking, has made known to us that he cares (we can use no other word) for men as individual beings, and the whole purpose of his communication concerns us as immortal beings. He has taught us, that he does sustain relations to us, the nature of which we may inadequately express by calling them personal relations. He has through Christ spoken to us, to borrow the language of Scripture, as man to man. For our sakes his ordinary operations in producing the phenomena of nature have been suspended, and his power has been manifested in new modes of action; thus giving us assurance that the communication we have received is from the Source of all power. It is through this manifestation of God by Christ, and through this alone, that we are able to rest in the conviction, that He who supports all things in being may be contemplated by us as our individual Friend and Father, that all our concerns are his

care, and that our relations of entire dependence on his infinite goodness are to continue for ever.

If we may trust the decisions of our reason grounded on proofs which she can clearly comprehend, concerning subjects which lie within her sphere, such a supernatural manifestation has been made. The fact, I think, has not been sufficiently attended to, that our faith in the essential truths of religion, if derived from Christianity, rests on a very different basis from what it could do if derived from any other source. It requires for its support no experience, no knowledge, and no capacities, above the ordinary faculties and attainments of human nature. Christianity has so taught us, that all the reasoning necessary to a conviction of the truths which it has revealed lies, as I have elsewhere observed, entirely within the compass of our powers, and belongs to our familiar methods of investigation. The proofs which establish the fact that the Gospels were written by those to whom they are ascribed, the proofs that attest the reality of all those other facts which necessarily imply a divine interposition, are of the same nature as the proofs on which we rely as to any other historical fact, or any natural phenomenon about which we have no distrust. They are equally level to our comprehension.

The manifestation through Christ of the Infinite Being, and of his purposes toward us, still leaves us, without doubt, in great ignorance. We are still surrounded by difficulties which we cannot solve, and questions press upon us which we cannot answer. But it has taught us all that it is necessary for us to know as the foundation of the highest virtue and the most glorious hopes. All correct conceptions of religion, of the moral nature, the relations, and the duties of man,— all which constitutes the highest philosophy, that philosophy which concerns the noblest objects of thought and the most important interests of man,— must rest on those realities which the revelation of God has discovered to us, and of which we can in no other way have assurance. All speculations concerning religion in which God's miraculous revelation of himself through Christ is not recognized, may be compared to the speculations of one who should form a theory concerning the probable motions of the heavenly bodies, without adverting to the fact, that the laws to which those motions are conformed have been demonstrated.

THE Gospels are the history of this miraculous revelation of God to man. But they are not its history alone. They are permanent evidences of

the fact, that such a revelation has been made. This evidence appears in the very constitution of those books,—in their actually possessing the characteristics which have been insisted upon by unbelievers (like Strauss) as a main ground for disputing their credibility, and which many believers have most unwisely been disposed to disguise or deny. It appears in what to human apprehension may, at first view, seem their marvellous incongruities.

The Gospels are rude works of certain Jews, men belonging to a despised race, themselves very unskilled in writing, having no literary or philosophical culture, and not distinguished by any uncommon natural powers of mind. They are stamped with the character of the nation and the age in which they were written. But whatever they may discover of human incapacity or imperfection appears in intimate union with conceptions, which I do not say that the minds of their uninstructed writers could not have attained, but which no human mind could have attained without being supernaturally enlightened by God,—conceptions, of religion and duty, of all that is most sublime in character, views of God and man, of life and immortality, far transcending all which mere human philosophy has reached. Considered only as liter-

ary compositions, the Gospels are precisely such works as we might expect from their authors,—a fisherman of Galilee, a tax-gatherer of Galilee, and two other Jews, their associates. Yet in these works, when we pass through their outward form to their contents, and contemplate the accounts which their authors give of their Master, we find the exhibition of a character to which there is elsewhere no parallel and no approach in history or fiction; for these accounts form a consistent representation of one singled out from the rest of men to sustain peculiar relations to God and to the world, and thoroughly fulfilling these relations. It is impossible that this character should have been an invention of those in whose narratives it appears.

“God,” says St. Paul, “has chosen the foolish things of the world to put wise men to shame.” “My discourses and my preaching,” he tells the Corinthians, “were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but were accompanied by the manifestation of God’s spirit and power.” The first preachers of Christ were intrusted with that treasure of truth which he revealed. “But we have this treasure,” says the Apostle, “in earthen vessels; so that our exceeding strength is from God, and not of ourselves.” In these passages, and often elsewhere,

he refers to the inability of the first preachers of Christ to have originated his religion, or to establish it in the world through any natural powers or human wisdom which they possessed. Weak instruments indeed they were. To the apprehensions of many, it may seem incongruous that God should employ such ministers ; but this wonderful contrast between their human insufficiency and what they taught and what they accomplished, establishes the truth of the Apostle's declaration, that their sufficiency was from God. "We are not able of ourselves," he says, "to make account of anything as our own work, but our ability is from God."

Conformably to this, the union of human error and imperfection in the Gospels with their great essential characteristics, renders those books a standing miracle in evidence of the truth of Christianity. I use these words not loosely, not in the way of declamation, nor in any metaphorical sense, but in their literal meaning. The Gospels bear with them a supernatural character ; for they present most striking and apparently contradictory phenomena, which cannot be accounted for by what we call natural causes ; and thus they are in themselves a permanent miracle, an evidence to men of all ages.

CHAPTER VI.

STRAUSS'S PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIANITY.—REMARKS ON MODERN GERMAN PHILOSOPHY.

THOUGH it is something like passing from clear air and bright sunshine into a chilling and pestilential congregation of vapors, yet we will return once more to the speculations of Strauss. The purpose in view is sufficiently important to justify our doing so. The “Concluding Dissertation” of his book is full of instruction, but instruction of a wholly different kind from what the writer proposed to impart.

In this Dissertation he gives his readers to understand, that, in his own opinion, he has accomplished a great work. He begins by saying:—

“The results of the inquiry which we have now brought to a close, have apparently annihilated the greatest and most valuable part of that which the Christian has been wont to believe concerning his Saviour Jesus, have uprooted all the animating motives which he has gathered from his faith, and withered all his consolations. The boundless store

of truth and life which for eighteen centuries has been the aliment of humanity, seems irretrievably dissipated; the most sublime levelled with the dust, God divested of his grace, man of his dignity, and the tie between heaven and earth broken. Piety turns away with horror from so fearful an act of desecration, and strong in the impregnable self-evidence of its faith, pronounces that, let an audacious criticism attempt what it will, all which the scriptures declare, and the church believes of Christ, will still subsist as eternal truth, nor needs one iota of it to be renounced. Thus at the conclusion of the criticism of the history of Jesus, there presents itself this problem: to re-establish dogmatically that which has been destroyed critically.”*

The larger part of the paragraph which I have quoted is plain in its meaning;—and no comment can be required on this cold-blooded bravado of infidelity. The greater part of the paragraph is, as I have said, intelligible; but this is not true of the last sentence:—“Thus, at the conclusion of the criticism of the history of Jesus, there presents itself this problem: to re-establish dogmatically that which has been destroyed critically.”

* Vol. III. p. 396.

It is with these words as with other similar aggregates of words which form the staple of what passes for original thought in the works of many German speculatists. No intelligible purpose can be assigned to them, except by considering what meaning, or rather what pretence of meaning, the connection requires in order to keep up a seeming continuity of thought. Proceeding by this rule, we must understand Strauss as saying, that by a critical examination the history of Jesus has been shown to be false, and that the problem remains to re-establish this history as true under the form of a system of doctrines; or, in other words, to convert the historical fictions concerning Jesus into propositions which, as doctrines of religion, may be received as true. The problem proposed is, to discover some method by which essential falsehood may be changed into essential truth, which truth, it is implied, may form a satisfactory substitute for the falsehood.

But the darkness becomes more gross as we proceed; and we grope in vain for any tangible meaning. A little after the passage just quoted, the following occurs:—

“Hitherto our criticism [has] had for its object what Christianity is, as it appears in the history

of Jesus given in the evangelical records. Now this history having been called in question by our doubts, it reflects itself upon itself [throws itself back upon itself], and seeks an asylum in the soul of the believer, where, however, it exists not as simple history, but as a history reflected upon itself, that is, as a creed and dogma.”*

From such passages nothing can be gathered, but that Strauss had a notion that some substitute was to be provided for the belief of a Christian, which might replace all that he had destroyed,

* “Bisher war Gegenstand der Kritik der christliche Inhalt, wie er in den evangelischen Urkunden als Geschichte Jesu vorliegt: nun dieser durch den Zweifel in Anspruch genommen ist, reflectirt er sich in sich, sucht eine Freistätte im Innern der Glaubigen, wo er aber nicht als blosse Geschichte, sondern als in sich reflectirte Geschichte, d. h. als Bekenntniss und Dogma, vorhanden ist.” — Leben Jesu, (§ 144,) II. 665.

I give my own rendering above, because Strauss's English translator appears to me to have failed, here as elsewhere, I do not say in giving the sense of the original, for it would be hard to bring it as a charge against him, that he has not done what was impossible, but in giving English words which fairly represent the German. He renders thus:—“Hitherto our criticism had for its object the data of Christianity, as historically presented in the evangelical records; now these data having been called in question in their historical form, assume that of a mental product, and find a refuge in the soul of the believer; where they exist, not as a simple history, but a reflected history, that is, a confession of faith, a received dogma.” — Vol. III. p. 398.

and that this substitute was in some way to be connected with the history of Christ, "reflected upon itself."

In regard, however, to the work of re-establishing what he had destroyed, Strauss says: —

"The critic seems to require no such re-establishment, since he is able to endure the annihilation resulting from his own labors. Hence it might be supposed that the critic, when he seeks to rescue the dogma from the flames which his criticism has kindled, acts falsely in relation to his own point of view, since, to satisfy the believer, he treats what is valueless for himself as if he esteemed it to be a jewel."

"But," he adds, "in proportion as he is distinguished from the naturalistic theologian and the free-thinker,— in proportion as his criticism is conceived in the spirit of the nineteenth century,— he is filled with veneration for every religion, and especially for the substance of the sublimest of all religions, the Christian, which he perceives to be identical with the deepest philosophical truth; and hence, after having in the course of his criticism exhibited only the differences between his conviction and the historical belief of the Christian, he will feel urged to place that identity in a

just light";* — that is, as appears from what follows, the identity of the substance of Christianity with the atheistic philosophy of Hegel.

In what follows the introductory matter from which I have quoted, Strauss goes over various schemes of religion, apparently with the purpose of finding some substitute for the common belief of Christians in the truth of the history of Christ. He first treats at length of what he calls "the Christology of the Orthodox System." But there was no reason for introducing this scheme, nor any propriety in doing so, since, whatever may be its character in other respects, it supposes for its foundation the belief of the history of Christ as given in the Gospels, and cannot, therefore, be proffered as a substitute for belief. He then passes to what is properly to his purpose, the exposition of various schemes of infidelity which have prevailed among his countrymen,— that of the earlier Rationalists, and then those of Schleiermacher, Kant, De Wette, and others, all of which he rejects as unsatisfactory, and finally comes down to the latest product of German philosophy, the Hegelian theory, as modified by himself. This may be explained as follows.

* Vol. III. p. 397.

Schelling laid down the proposition, that "the incarnation of God is an incarnation from eternity." "By the incarnate Son of God," says Strauss, "he understood the finite itself as it attains consciousness in man, and, in its distinction from the infinite, with which it is yet one, appears as a suffering God, subjected to the relations of time."^{*}

"In the latest philosophy," says Strauss, "this idea is thus further developed. If God be pronounced to be spirit, then, since man also is spirit, it follows at once that they are not in themselves [essentially] different. Furthermore, since it is essential to spirit in its distinction from itself to remain identical with itself, to possess itself in another than itself, it is implied in our recognition of God as spirit, that he does not remain fixed as a barren infinite without and above finite things, but enters into them, producing the finite, nature and the human spirit, only as a renunciation of

* Vol. III. pp. 432, 433. I give my own rendering. The original of the last sentence is as follows: "Verstand der letztere [Schelling] unter dem menschgewordenen Sohn Gottes das Endliche selbst, wie es im Menschen zum Bewusstsein kommt, und in seinem Unterschiede von dem Unendlichen, mit dem es doch Eins ist, als ein leidender, und den Verhältnissen der Zeit unterworfener Gott erscheint." — Leben Jesu, (§ 150,) II. 704.

himself, from which, on the other hand, he is ever returning into unity with himself. Simply as finite spirit confined to its finiteness, man has not truth [has no true, real existence]; and as little has God reality simply as infinite spirit, secluding itself in its infinity. The infinite is real spirit only when it develops itself into finite spirits; as the finite spirit is true only when it merges itself in the infinite. Thus the true and real being of spirit is neither God by himself, nor man by himself, but the God-man [the union of God and man]; neither its infinity alone, nor its finiteness alone, but the motion of influx and reflux between both, which on the divine side is revelation; on the human, religion.”*

The next paragraph begins with supposing the truth of the proposition, that “God and man are in themselves *one*.” (“Sind Gott und Mensch an sich *Eins*,” u. s. w.)

As some key to what it was the purpose of the writer to have regarded as the meaning of the

* Here again the rendering is my own. Strauss's English translator, Vol. III. p. 433, seems either not to have fully comprehended the philosophy and reasoning of his author, or not to have been disposed to present it unveiled to English readers. The original passage stands in Strauss, § 150, Vol. II. pp. 704, 705.

words I have quoted, it is to be understood that, according to the philosophy of Hegel, the substratum of all things is infinite, unconscious spirit, which assumes consciousness of its own existence in finite, human spirits, into which it develops itself. On these doctrines of Schelling and Hegel is founded Strauss's proposed substitute for Christianity. It is an allegory, in which he represents the true doctrines of philosophy,—of the highest German philosophy,—as shadowed forth symbolically in what he regards as the orthodox system of the Church concerning the character and office of Christ. He thus exhibits it.

“The key of the whole Christology is this, that the subject of those predicates which the Church ascribes to Christ is not to be regarded as an individual, but as an *Idea*; as a real *Idea*, however,—not as, according to Kant, an imaginary one. Considered as existing in an individual, in a God-man, the attributes and offices which the doctrine of the Church ascribes to Christ are inconsistent with each other; in the *Idea* of the species, they agree together. Humanity is the union of the two natures; it is God become man; the infinite spirit renouncing its infinity and becoming finite, and the finite spirit becoming conscious of its in-

finity. It is the child of the visible mother and the invisible father ; of spirit and of nature. It is the worker of miracles ; inasmuch as, in the progress of man's history, the spirit is continually obtaining more full mastery over nature, both in man and around him ; nature becoming subjected to its activity as a powerless material. Humanity is the sinless ; inasmuch as the process of its development is blameless ; pollution cleaves only to the individual, but in the species, and in its history, is thrown off. It is Humanity that dies, and rises from the dead, and ascends to heaven ; inasmuch as, through the negation of its *naturality* [what in its composition belongs to nature], it is continually attaining a higher spiritual life, and by throwing off its finiteness, as a personal, national spirit, a spirit of this world, its unity with the infinite spirit of heaven is brought out. Through faith in this Christ, particularly in his death and resurrection, is man justified before God ; that is, through the quickening of the *Idea* of Humanity within him the individual becomes a partaker of the divinely human life of the species ; — conformably to the fact, that the negation of *naturality* and sensuality (*Sinnlichkeit*)— which is but the negation of a negation, seeing that they

are but the negation of the spiritual— is the only way for men to attain the true spiritual life.

“This alone is the absolute purport of the Christology. That this appears connected with the person and history of an individual, belongs merely to its historical form.” *

I HAVE said that the Concluding Dissertation of Strauss is full of instruction. It is rare to meet with an equal number of pages from which so much may be learned, or which afford information of so thorough a character. Every one whose attention has been drawn to the strange and multifarious doctrines that have obtained currency in our day, has heard of the speculations of German philosophers (so called) in theology and metaphysics, and knows something of their pretensions and of the boasts of their admirers. The Concluding Dissertation of Strauss affords abundant materials for forming a judgment of the character and results of those speculations, which all our further knowledge of them may serve to confirm. In this case, if in any, the old proverb holds true, that *it*

* Leben Jesu, (§ 151,) II. 709 – 711 ; English Translation, III. 437, 438. I have formerly had occasion to quote and remark on this passage. See “Tracts concerning Christianity,” p. 360, seqq.

is not necessary to drain the ocean to learn that its waters are salt. The materials for forming a judgment of this philosophy are not furnished by an opposer of it, by an adherent of common sense, nor by a neophyte giving his crude, mistaken imaginations of what he has imperfectly learned, but by one initiated in its mysteries, who is liable to no suspicion of intending to expose them to reproach or derision.

How then must such passages as I have quoted be regarded, I do not say by a religious man, or by an enlightened philosopher, but by a man of common clearness of intellect, accustomed to expect some meaning in language, and some coherence of ideas? How would such writers as Strauss, and the other speculatists among his countrymen to whom he is allied, have been looked upon by the English thinkers of former times (from whom it must be confessed that in the general tone of our literature we have somewhat degenerated),—by such men as Locke, and those who followed him, by Berkeley and Butler? What scope might these theorists, “all-seeing in their mists,” have afforded for the penetrating and destructive satire of Pope! With what zest would Swift have given them a place among his philosophers of Laputa! How

would Burke (who taught that “where there is no sound reason, there is no real virtue”) have poured out upon them the tempest of his scorn with its vivid lightnings! — if we may suppose the attention of men like Pope and Swift and Burke to have been fixed on such a class of writers. They dwell in a chaos of ideas which has no analogy to the world in which men think and reason and endue their purposes with intelligible words. There is no community between the two regions. The inhabitants of one have no sentiments or language in common with those of the other. The opposition between them is like that which the ancient Persians imagined between the empire of light and the empire of darkness.

Such being the character of these speculations, it is natural that they should be put forward with great pretension, and that those who receive them should congratulate each other on their intellectual superiority. For there is but an alternative. The case admits of no qualified judgment. These speculations are either, as their admirers contend, revelations of transcendent wisdom, or they are something of a wholly different character.

THE school of writers to which such speculatists

as Strauss belongs is not, in its modern development among his countrymen, to be characterized by its peculiar doctrines; for, so far as its doctrines have assumed a determinate shape, there has been little accordance among those of different parties into which it has been divided, except in their common irreligious and debasing tendency. But it is characterized by a use of language, which, considered either in itself, or in its connection with what is elsewhere propounded, or in its relations to unquestionable truths and to the common conceptions of men, presents no intelligible ideas. It is a school which existed long before its recent appearance in Germany. It is of great antiquity, it has spread very widely, and occupied vast regions in the domain of opinion, always presenting the same essential characteristics. It may be called "the School of the Mystics," in the widest sense of that term, or "the School of the Incomprehensible"; or perhaps no other name can be found for it more appropriate than one which has already become attached to the modern branch of it, and which may be extended to the whole, "the Transcendental School." Quintilian has preserved the story of a teacher of composition who inculcated on his pupils the excellence of obscurity. He con-

densed his instructions to them into one Greek word, *Σκότισον*, *Darken*. Quintilian, being a Latin, and the Latins in general, not affecting that style, evidently regarded the direction as something ridiculous. He does not advert to the fact, that it had been a fundamental rule of writing with many of the Greek philosophers, which probably originated in an incapacity not to darken. I have elsewhere had occasion to show that obscurity was regarded from an early period as a distinguishing excellence of style, and the appropriate badge of the profoundest philosophy.*

The spirit of this school, the disposition to obscure and distort what is false, or trivial, or unmeaning, so that it may appear some revelation of wisdom before unknown, to make doctrines out of unformed imaginations, and to throw all knowledge into confusion by the abuse of language, appears in much that remains or is known of the ancient philosophers before the time of Cicero. After his time this widely-spread school embraced the whole body of the later Platonists, and the allied sects of the Gnostics and the Jewish Cabballists. It has not been confined to Europe, but has enveloped in

* See Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels, Vol. III. pp. 86-91.

its darkness the philosophy and theology of India and Persia. Its spirit has possessed that long series of Christian writers on dogmatic theology (so called) who have been zealous in maintaining as essential to our religion doctrines before which they summon reason to humble herself in sacred horror. It was the spirit of the schoolmen of the Middle Ages,—to whom and to their successors Locke, in treating of the nature of language and the characteristics of this style of writing, had particular reference. It showed itself equally in their contemporaries, the alchemists and the astrologers, whose pretensions were as monstrous, and whose language was as barbarous, as any of the present day. Before its recent great outbreak in Germany, it had manifested itself often in modern times by smaller exhibitions which had prepared for its fuller display. It had characterized the speculations of Spinoza and the pantheists; for no doctrine can involve absurdities more monstrous than pantheism, or consequently bring together more unintelligible combinations of words. It is through fellowship in the same great school, that the doctrine of Spinoza has had so marked an influence on German literature, and that such admiration has been expressed for him by modern transcen-

dental philosophers,—for his penetration, his cogent reasoning, and even, as if in mockery of common sense, for his highly devotional spirit.*

To a philosopher of this school it may appear a strange doctrine, that so humble a matter as the right use of words can have anything to do with his speculations. In his view, these speculations penetrate the uttermost regions of thought; and the language in which they are put forth is not to

* I speak only of the larger and more distinguished bodies of which this school has been composed; but perhaps, even in such an enumeration, Jacob Boehme and his followers ought not to be passed over without notice; for he was one of the most famous of mystics, and was called in his day "the Teutonic philosopher,"—a name the appropriateness of which has been confirmed by the recent phenomena of German philosophy, and by his having been recognized by some of its most famous teachers as one of its forerunners and progenitors. His works were translated into English by William Law (better known as the author of "*A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*"). But those to whom the English language is their mother tongue are in general but poor recipients of mysticism, and in this department of thought English literature has produced of late but one conspicuous name; I say but one conspicuous *name*, for the great work of Coleridge, which was to reconcile and supersede all other philosophy, had never, I conceive, what logicians call a potential being. The *idea* of it, in the semi-Platonic sense of the word *idea*, never existed in his own mind. But Coleridge was a man whose natural powers, had he been true to himself, might have enabled him to become something very different from a mystagogue of German metaphysics.

be understood through an acquaintance with the ordinary signification of terms. Its meaning is to be perceived by a peculiar sense, by a power of inward vision which derives no aid from extraneous knowledge. He promulgates great truths, which are not to be understood, but to be felt. His conceptions are debased by being brought down to what is intelligible. He announces propositions, which to common men seem mere absurdities, as when, to take one among ten thousand, Hegel announces that "mere being and mere nothing are the same."* It is amid the darkness of language which has no vulgar meaning, that the higher subjects of thought are to be shown surrounded by a phosphoric glimmer.—But the unintelligible words that are used are words of magic by which

* "Das reine Seyn und das reine Nichts ist dasselbe."

"Peut-être," says Madame de Staël in her eulogy of Kant,— "Peut-être toutefois n'auroit-il creusé si profondément dans la science de l'entendement humain, s'il avoit mis plus d'importance aux expressions dont il se servoit pour l'expliquer."

This is the same sort of language as if one were to say of a mathematician, that perhaps his investigations would not have been so profound, if he had attended more to the significance of the symbols used by him.

She adds: "Dans ses traités de métaphysique, il prend des mots comme des chiffres, et leur donne la valeur qu'il veut sans s'embarrasser de celle qu'ils tiennent de l'usage."

the sun is darkened at mid-day; and through the obscurity which envelops all things, shapes present themselves like those which Æneas saw

“Vestibulum ante ipsum, primitque in fauibus Orci,”

before the vestibule, and where opened the jaws of Hell, — horrible phantoms which he was about to assail with human arms, if his guide had not admonished him that they were but shadows.

“Et, ni docta comes tenues sine corpore vitas
Admoneat volitare cavâ sub imagine formæ,
Irruat, et frustra ferro diverberet umbras.”

If all this were mere folly, it would be comparatively a matter of little concern. But we have seen that it is not mere folly. It is rare that folly is not mischievous. Its effects are very often disastrous. Speculative folly and practical folly commonly go together. The preachers of false doctrines, the opposers of truth, the utterers of what wise men regard as nonsense, have wrought, directly or indirectly, most of the moral evil that exists in the civilized world. Men — with the exception of those whose conduct is determined by circumstances and by impulses obeyed without reflection, and of those whose reason is violently borne down by their passions — pretend to be governed

by their opinions, on the ground that their opinions are conformed to the truth. There is no greater evil-doer than he who, in the restlessness and recklessness of his vanity, furnishes them with pretences for any belief or disbelief that may either loosen their sense of the obligations of religion and morality, or may pervert and misguide it. False speculations, and the practical theories which have resulted from them,—I refer to speculations old as well as new,—are among the chief sources of those awful calamities with which Europe is now afflicted. The wild doctrines of Communism and Socialism, the dreams and the absurdities of such men as St. Simon, Robert Owen, and Fourier, have caused the streets of Paris to run with blood. It is the conflict, not between right and wrong, not between truth and falsehood, but between new errors and old prejudices, the one tending to evil not less than the other, which is now unsettling the foundations of Christian and civilized society throughout a great portion of Europe. All the party watchwords by which the ferocious passions and the viler propensities of men are excited, or by which their ignorance and folly are imposed upon, acquire their power for evil from the abuse of language. They are general terms, such as *liberty*,

fraternity, equality, capable of being understood in very different senses and applications, and therefore of being easily perverted, which are cast abroad among the multitude, to be interpreted according to the passions, the folly, the caprice, or the madness of those who may adopt them as their cry.

It is by its debasing and destroying the moral and religious sentiments of men, that we discern the worst effect of that school of pretended philosophy which deals with imaginations instead of truths, with unformed thought, assumptions equally arbitrary and absurd, and a vague, barbarous, false vocabulary. It has wrought this effect, not only by the doctrines it has directly taught, but also by spreading confusion through men's ideas and language, and thus confounding their reason, so that the supremacy of truth in their minds and hearts cannot be established. It has infected the whole body of literature connected with it, depraving the taste of its writers and its admirers ; — for taste is not a distinct faculty of the mind ; it is in each individual an expression of his whole character, of his likings and dislikings, of the quickness or obtuseness of his intellectual perceptions, and of the purity or depravation of his moral sentiments.

Thus it appears in the corrupt forms which so much of the literature of Continental Europe has assumed, with its bold lessons of vice and irreligion. Its effects in deadening the love of truth and disordering the powers of reasoning have been made apparent in the departments of philology, antiquities, and history. Nay, its influence has been felt where it might least be expected, for it has carried its reckless assertions and its unintelligible jargon even into the physical sciences.

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CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

WE have thus taken a view of the work of Strauss, and of that philosophy, falsely so called, with which this and many similar works have been connected. The importance of such works, and of the speculations on which they are grounded,—their efficiency in the production of evil,—is liable to be greatly underrated. Putting aside the brute influence of the passions, the other causes which affect the condition of society and the character of individuals are often but little attended to; and their character and workings may not be readily discerned and appreciated. The moral atmosphere may be filled with pestilential miasmata, the presence of which may not be obvious to our grosser senses. Religion, morals, the love of truth, the principles on which rests the well-being of man, may be gradually undermined; the evil may be

working on, from day to day, in secret, almost unmarked, or other props wholly ineffectual may be resorted to for temporary security; but the ruin must follow.

So far as men are not driven blindly onward by their unreasoning passions, they are governed by their opinions. The opinions of an individual are but another name for the whole body of principles from which he professes to act, so far as he professes to act reasonably. It is, therefore, a matter of essential concern to us, that our opinions should be correct. But the opinions of a great majority of men are determined, the opinions of all men are influenced more or less powerfully, by a regard to the representations and reasonings, true or false, or by a mere regard to the determinations, of those who are, or those who are esteemed to be, distinguished by their intellectual superiority. It is, then, of the utmost importance to us, that our guides should be trustworthy. Our hope for the regeneration and improvement of our race must be in the prevalence of truth,—of Christian truth, of truth concerning our nature, intellectual and moral, our condition in this world, our means of self-improvement, our relations to our fellow-men, and our connection with all those realities beyond

the sphere of the senses, from which Christianity has withdrawn the veil. "I was born for this end," said he whom God sent to the world to save the world,—"I was born for this end, and for this end have I come to the world, to bear testimony to the Truth. Every one who loves the Truth obeys my voice."

Those great truths which essentially concern all that men do and feel are the principles on which our characters should be formed. They are the most important objects of our intellect, because they relate to the most important objects of our existence. They do not spontaneously develop themselves. In order to establish those truths among men and give them their due supremacy, intellectual discipline is necessary, a wide knowledge of facts, the acquisition of clear ideas, the habit of using language correctly, and the power and the art of reasoning. When a knowledge of them is thus attained, if it be distinctly put before men, it may be widely communicated; for these truths have a natural affinity with all that is excellent in our nature. The deductions of the most profound and enlightened philosophy correspond with and confirm the dictates of plain good sense. It is with the highest exertions of intel-

lect as with the noblest productions of what is popularly called genius. The results are comprehended and felt by millions with whom they could not have originated; and this community of comprehension and feeling may bring us into close association with the master minds of the world. Inferior as may be our creative or reasoning powers, we become conscious of an essential equality with them when we can enter into their conceptions, sympathize in their sentiments, and follow them in their reasoning.

IN this country we have peculiar advantages for the attainment and promulgation of truth. There doubtless exist here mistakes and prejudices in abundance. But we have not to encounter those prejudices existing elsewhere, which have become rigid and unyielding through age, and which derive vitality and vigor from being incorporated with the love of power, rank, and wealth, in privileged classes, whose distinctions depend on them for support. We have our share of that clear-sightedness and good sense by which those who inherit the English tongue and English literature are distinguished as a general characteristic, and which may prevent us from being easily, or, at

least, from being long, imposed upon by false pretences. But, on the other hand, there are discouraging circumstances. There is a want among us of a proper appreciation of the importance of intellectual discipline, of that discipline through which men are formed to reason rightly on subjects that concern their highest interests, but which are not immediately connected with their ordinary business. We cultivate successfully the physical and exact sciences, and especially those through which the arts of life are promoted. We are distinguished by our skill in their application, by the number and ingenuity of our mechanical inventions. But these are not the studies on which the essential well-being of man depends. Their cultivation alone can do nothing to save a nation from moral degeneracy and ruin. Nowhere in Europe have they flourished more than in that country which, having long suffered from accumulating causes of misery, irreligion, and vice, has, since the latter part of the last century, been restlessly and violently changing its forms of government, and remodelling the constitution of society, without finding a remedy for its evils. There are other departments of thought and learning of far higher importance, because truth and error, knowledge

and ignorance, concerning the subjects which they embrace, are of far more interest to human happiness.

I will refer, for example, to two sciences, which relate less immediately to the formation of individual character, but rather concern the present well-being of masses of men,—the science of political government, and the science of political economy. There is, as I believe, no literary institution in our country in which they are so taught as to furnish those resorting to it for instruction with such knowledge, such principles, and such habits of reasoning, as to prepare them for those duties to which they may be called as public men. Nor are these institutions centres from which may spread through the great body of our people those correct notions concerning the principles of public policy which it is important should exist, when, as with us, the course of public policy is ultimately determined by the great body of the people. Our colleges and universities do not afford the encouragement necessary to form in connection with them a body of men fitted to be the teachers and guides of the community in these departments of learning. They have not sufficient means, if they have any, for the support of professorships, which such men might be ambitious of holding.

Of the evils of ignorance in these departments of knowledge, the Old World is presenting appalling examples. We see in France that principles of government, the truth of which has been forced on the conviction of every intelligent American through his experience of the workings of our republican institutions, are unknown or disregarded. As the next of those disastrous experiments on the happiness of society of which that nation has tried so many, it appears that all the powers of government are, for as long a time as such a constitution may last, to be concentrated in one large Convention, which will be as unrestrained and as uncontrollable in its exercise of them as the fierce democracy of Athens, or as that Convention of the Reign of Terror, of which the dreadful memory might seem to have died away in the country over which it tyrannized, if it were not for the exculpatory eulogies which are uttered on the disinterestedness, patriotism, and energy of some of its most atrocious members. In the very formation of any central power which is alone to exercise throughout the country all the functions of the government, in the cry of "The Republic, *one and indivisible*," we Americans perceive another fundamental mistake. Republican institutions, re-

publican even only in form and name, cannot exist for the happiness of a large community, they cannot exist at all for any long time, without a distribution of powers to bodies subordinate to the general government, each independent in its own sphere, each taking charge of its own particular concerns, and each ready to check all encroachments of the central power. With what a burst of indignation and repulsion would a prefect be received who should be sent from a convention at Washington to govern my native State of Massachusetts! or how in any town or city of this State would an officer be welcomed who should be despatched from a body of delegates in Boston to take on himself the management of its affairs? The present condition of France affords no hope of the speedy restoration of internal quiet and the formation of a well-ordered community. So long as the supreme, undivided power resides nominally in a national assembly convened in Paris, it seems clear that the main element in the actual government of the country will be the mob of Paris, or the army by which it is controlled,—the general who commands the latter, or the demagogues who rule the former.

When we turn from France to Germany, the

prospect is not less gloomy. There the structure of society seems to be falling to pieces, without either power or skill for its reconstruction. The false philosophy that has prevailed in that country has destroyed in a great degree men's ability to reason, and substituted visionary theories and blind fanaticism in its place. It has not only unsettled all just notions of the political relations of men, but, through its irreligious and demoralizing character, has done very much to destroy those principles on which all right conceptions of our duties to our fellow-men, and all right feelings toward them, must be founded.

THE establishment of truth in those departments of science which concern the present well-being of men as members of civil society must be the result of the correct exercise of intellect. In order, therefore, to cultivate those departments of science successfully, other studies are requisite. They are those which inform and discipline the intellect, so that it may be correctly exercised. They are those that instruct us in the constitution of the mind, its powers, and the manner in which they are to be employed,— that make known to us the causes of our intellectual errors and misjudgments, and teach

the art of thinking clearly and of reasoning justly, and consequently, what is implied in this, the art of properly using words, the embodiments and the instruments of thought. These are studies which have of late been generally neglected. The philosophy which has flourished in Germany requires no qualification of this remark ; on the contrary, the reception of that philosophy there and elsewhere proves its correctness.

The intellectual discipline of which I speak is equally necessary for the establishment of the truth in those higher departments of knowledge which essentially concern all that is most important in our being,—our relations to God and to eternity, and our fundamental relations to our fellow-men. The study of these subjects, of the sciences of religion and morals, and of the vast body of facts connected with them, has shared with us the neglect into which it has fallen elsewhere. There is no strong prevailing sense of the importance of teaching men to think and reason aright concerning them ; no operative conviction of the importance of establishing the truth concerning them. It would seem to be thought that the solution of those great problems, the true or the false solution of which affects the whole of character and conduct, the

well-being of men equally in this world and in the next, has been determined by traditionary authority, or may be left to men's *consciousness*, so called, their natural instincts, their intuitions, or to a sort of special inspiration, vouchsafed to those who do not interfere with it by any action of their own minds; so that the inquiry after truths and principles is only an unprofitable speculation. The times have altered since the most eminent theologians and moralists of their respective ages were the men most distinguished for their intellectual powers and acquisitions, such men as Grotius and Locke and Le Clerc. They have altered since the days of the heathen philosophers,—of such men as Socrates and Plato and Cicero, by whom, very imperfect as were their conceptions, theology, the science of things divine, was regarded, as it is, as the highest philosophy.

The study of theology, embracing as its fundamental requisite the study of Christianity, is essentially connected with almost all the other important branches of knowledge. It is connected with the natural sciences; for their highest value consists in making known to us the works of God. It stands in yet another, very different, relation to them, through the fact that the progress of knowl-

edge in some of these sciences has brought them into conflict with false doctrines which have been zealously represented as fundamental in Christian faith. On the other hand, the study of religion is intimately connected with the whole of metaphysical science, the science of mind, which in its widest extent embraces all our knowledge of man's nature, except of his corporeal part, and all our knowledge of Him who formed man in his own likeness. It requires the study of the languages which introduce us to an acquaintance with the Old World as it existed before Christianity, and which thus form the connecting link between ancient and modern civilization. It is blended throughout with the history of opinions, that is, with the history of the human mind and character; for in the formation of the most important opinions, religion, true or false, has been the main agent, and false opinions have reacted powerfully on religion. It has other connections, which, had they not been so neglected, it might seem unnecessary to point out. If religion be true, if Christianity be a revelation from God, then the study of religion, of Christianity, and of morals, which ought to be based on Christianity, should enter as the most essential element into all those inqui-

ries that concern the social and political relations of men.

But the tendency of our times is to disconnect the truths of religion, and the more high and comprehensive principles of morality, from the discussion of those subjects of politics and political economy which concern immediately the present well-being of men. I will take a single example from that theory concerning the causes of want, misery, and vice which teaches, in effect, that the more fortunate portion of men, having no direct means of rendering effectual aid to the suffering, have no important duties to perform towards them, except the duty of providing them with clergymen and schoolmasters,—of whose proffered instruction the terrible pressure of want must render them unapt recipients,—and especially the duty of exhorting them to put a stop to the increase of population. Compare the practical deductions from this theory with the spirit which pervades the precepts of our Saviour, and especially with his most solemn words,—not their verbal meaning, for in that no man of sense can take refuge from their true purport, but with the spirit of those words: — “ Then will they also answer, Lord, when did we see thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stran-

ger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee? Then he will answer them, I tell you in truth, In not doing so to one of the humblest of these, you did not do so to me." And observe further, that no attempt is made to reconcile the deductions from the theory in question with the precepts of Christ.

There is very much to be learned and to be taught in the science of religion, and the twin science of morals. As regards religion, the present anarchy of opinion is obviously such, that this remark requires no confirmation. It follows as a corollary from this state of unsettled opinion concerning religion, that the true principles of moral action have not been established, and are not generally understood. This again may be asserted without hazard, as it is made evident by the want of agreement concerning them. The development and application of the supposed principles of moral science are a matter of still greater uncertainty, and contrariety of opinion. How differently are the same qualities and actions estimated by different men! With what opposite sentiments are the same characters regarded! — I mean, of course, when the facts which determine the character are equally well known. How unlike would be the

judgment of a “Hero-worshipper” concerning them to that of a Christian philosopher! What admiration is given to the union of atrocious wickedness with great intellectual energy! What toleration is shown for those whose vices assume the garb of pleasure, in whose baskets of flowers asps lie hid, and who purchase their indulgences through the degradation and misery of others and of themselves! What contrary decisions are pronounced in cases which may seem to present a conflict of duties! How zealously do those who see but one side of such questions often contend that right is to be done without regard to consequences; as if, when a doubt may arise, there were other modes of determining what is right and wrong beside a regard to the good or evil consequences of conduct! How differently do different men judge of the lawfulness of subscribing to the Articles and conforming to the Liturgy of the Church of England, by those who have no faith in many of its doctrines according to the obvious meaning of the words in which they are expressed!—doctrines which, thus understood, no intelligent man at the present day, who has made them a subject of conscientious thought, can persuade himself that he believes, however he may persuade himself that he is justified in giving his

aid to the Church to impose them on the community as doctrines taught by God. What diversity of judgment exists concerning the lawfulness or unlawfulness of many modes of action, especially those involved in the internal and external policy of nations! What declamation may be heard about human rights from teachers without any correct notion, often without any notion at all, of what constitutes a right! What talk about conscience as an infallible guide, as the voice of God in our hearts, with the reservation that this infallible guide must be well instructed by us! How little are our obligations to our fellow-men understood, the perpetual control which they should have over our conduct, the extent of Christian charity, and the necessary modifications of its exercise! How few men think much on these subjects, or regulate their conduct by a regard to the highest, that is, Christian principles!

There is, as I have said, no proper provision made in our literary institutions for the prosecution of those studies on which the development of the intellect and character mainly depends. They do not afford to the generality of young men who resort to them for instruction facilities and inducements adapted to lead them to attend to

those studies with interest and success. Such young men, after completing their course of education, often pass into the world without the knowledge and the habits of reasoning that might enable them to form correct opinions, and without a strong feeling, which there has been nothing to produce, of the importance of truth and of the evil of error. As regards the most important of subjects, religion, so far as any proper discipline of mind is concerned, they are left very much to derive their opinions — opinions often assented to rather than embraced — from accident, from traditional influences, or from the far worse influences that may act upon them in the world. It may be said, that instruction in all that relates to the study of religion is given to those preparing for the clerical profession in schools expressly intended for this purpose. It is most earnestly to be wished that these schools, collectively, formed a more important exception to the remarks which have been made respecting our institutions of learning, and were of more avail for their professed end. But what is far more desirable is, that intellectual men, throughout the community, should comprehend that the duty of understanding the religion which they profess is not a duty confined to a particular order.

The great want in our country is the want of a body of men whose minds have been so informed and so disciplined as to qualify them to be trustworthy assistants and teachers of others in those branches of knowledge which concern the present well-being and the unchangeable, eternal interests of our race,—a body of men so enlightened, that for very shame, if this were all, they could not wilfully countenance essential error, and who might be ever ready to throw the weight of their influence into the scale of public opinion to counteract it. How such a body of men is to be formed among us is a question which cannot here be treated. Various suggestions of improvement in the constitution of our seats of learning, and in the condition of our clergy, might be offered and discussed. But we have been led, though by a natural and connected train of thought and feeling, to a subject foreign from the main purpose of this work; and this is not the place to enter into its details.

THE publication and the extended reception of such books as that of Strauss,—and there have been very many of a like character,—and the popularity of that literature of infidelity and vice, that “literature of despair,” as it was called by one

who had contributed much to its formation, which has been connected with such speculations, are among the worst indications of the character of our age. But even in the productions of scholars and of men of genius, who are far from recklessly offending against religion and morals, we too often miss a correct tone of sentiment, an open, high-minded, manly recognition of those truths which lie at the foundation of all virtue and happiness. Yet only in proportion as they are recognized can civilized society, where it is now thrown into such terrible confusion, be happily reorganized; and where its elements are not yet broken up, its preservation must depend on the continuance, and its improvement on the increase, of their influence. We, in these United States, share in the same common nature with the inhabitants of those States which are spread over the more southern portion of our continent; and nothing has saved us from the same anarchy and despotism, the same internal commotions and wars, with all their attendant depravation and misery, but a clearer perception and a deeper sense of the truths of religion and morals.

Vous êtes l'avenir du monde, were words addressed by Madame de Staël to an American, a

short time before her death. Her words were true. Through the providence of God, and the circumstances in which he has placed us, we have become the advanced guard of the civilized world. Our position is not to be viewed by us with any foolish spirit of vainglory, but with a strong feeling of our great responsibilities, our great deficiencies, and our manifold dangers. One truth it should impress upon us most deeply, that we are not to look to the prevailing sentiments, habits, and moral estimates of the Old World as guides for our opinions or conduct, but only to those eternal principles of right and wrong, which the Lawgiver of the Universe has sanctioned. We are acting — acting for good or evil — not for ourselves, nor for our posterity, alone. Over a great part of the civilized world the heavens are covered with thick clouds. But there is light still shining in the West. May it not be overcast. May it be the augury of a better day for mankind.

P A R T II.

ON THE
INTERNAL EVIDENCES
OF THE
GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPELS;
BEING
PORTIONS OF AN UNFINISHED WORK.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONSISTENCY OF THE NARRATIVE IN THE GOSPELS WITH ITSELF, AND WITH ALL OUR KNOWLEDGE BEARING ON THE SUBJECT.

THE ultimate purpose in proving the genuineness of the Gospels is to establish their authenticity. If genuine, they are the works of Apostles, who themselves witnessed the actions and heard the discourses of Christ; or of men who during a great part of their lives were conversant with Apostles, and derived from them the information which they have given us. By establishing their genuineness, the discussion of their authenticity or truth is reduced within narrow limits, and may easily be decided. These two subjects, however, though intimately connected, are in their own nature distinct, and admit of separate proof. But there are in the Gospels many intrinsic evidences of authenticity, which, at the same time, are evidences of genuineness. The peculiar character of these histories is

such as to show that they proceeded from the pens or from the lips of those who witnessed what is related. In regard to this internal evidence, therefore, the two subjects require to be treated in connection.

Among those proofs, then, equally of authenticity and of genuineness, which are found in the Gospels, one of the most important may be thus stated. In the narratives of the Evangelists, the existence of many facts which are not expressly mentioned is implied. In order to understand fully what is told, and to perceive its bearing and application, we must take into view very much that is not told. There is to be found in almost every part of the Gospels a latent reference to some existing state of things which is not described. But when we attend to the character of those facts with which different portions of the narrative are thus connected, we find that they are all probable or certain ; that we have distinct evidence of them from other sources ; or that, supposing the truth of what is related in the Gospels, and viewing this in connection with all our other knowledge on the subject in question, they are such as must or might have existed. The inferences from these histories, though many

and various, are all consistent with the histories themselves, and with whatever we can learn from other sources. In tracing out the necessary or probable bearing of those actions and discourses which are recorded, or in assigning their probable occasions or consequences, we detect no inconsistency with the history itself, and find no contradiction of known facts ; but, on the contrary, we are continually perceiving new marks of probability and truth. This coincidence between what is told and what is implied, this correspondence between the actions and discourses related and that state of things and series of events to which they refer as existing contemporaneously and running parallel with them, does not appear here and there only, but discovers itself throughout the Gospels.

But this consistency of the narrative with itself, both in what is told and in what may be inferred from it, and its consistency with all other known facts having a bearing upon it, is evidently not the work of study or artifice. It is not worth while to inquire whether it could in any case be produced by such means ; because there is no dispute that the whole character of the Gospels is opposed to such a supposition. They are very

inartificial compositions. If, moreover, the coincidences of which we speak had been factitious, and intended to give an air of probability to the narrative, they would not have been left so latent and obscure as they often are. The writer would have taken care that they should be noticed by the reader. On the contrary, those to which we particularly refer are obviously undesigned. If, then, the appearances which have been described really exist, they can be accounted for only by the truth of the history. It is impossible that a fiction pretending to the character of true history, especially a fiction relating to such events as are recorded in the Gospels, should be so consistent with itself, with probability, and with known facts, in such a number and variety of latent coincidences.

What has been said may be further illustrated by the following remarks. In the Gospels, Christ appears as a divine messenger endued with miraculous powers. We learn that the great purpose of his ministry was the moral and religious reformation of mankind; and accounts are given of what he said and did to effect this purpose. But we find in these books only some very general and imperfect notices of the moral and intellectual

character, the external state, the manners, usages, opinions, prejudices, and passions of those who were the immediate subjects of his ministry. Respecting these topics, however, we can gain much knowledge from a variety of sources, either by direct information or by probable inferences. Now, in proportion as our knowledge becomes more accurate and extensive, we perceive in a more clear and striking manner the reference and adaptation of what Christ is represented to have said and done to the character and circumstances of those whom he addressed, as well as its consistency with the character and purpose ascribed to Christ himself. But, further, the claims of such an extraordinary teacher, assuming to be a messenger from God himself, his miracles, and his discourses, must, admitting the representation given of them in the Gospels, have produced, in their operation upon those around him, consequences of a very remarkable character, different from and opposite to each other. Such a preacher could not have acted upon the mass of the Jewish nation, or upon those individuals with whom he was more nearly connected, without causing very marked and extraordinary phenomena as the result of his ministry. But here, again, the different effects of our

Saviour's ministry are but very partially described in the Gospels; and an explanation of these effects by a reference to the different circumstances of his hearers, or to their different states of mind, is scarcely, if at all, attempted. What is not told, however, is often unconsciously implied ; and what is implied is always what we might expect, or what we can account for as necessary or probable. In proportion, likewise, as we attain a more just and comprehensive view of the effects of his preaching, we perceive the occasion of many facts, and the immediate purpose of many discourses, which are not stated in the narrative, and of which, therefore, we may have had before no right conception. These coincidences are so numerous, and at the same time so obviously unstudied, as to give to the whole history the most decisive marks of truth, those which cannot be imitated.

The argument which it has been my purpose to state, if just, is important ; and it is one not often, if at all, adverted to. I may, therefore, be excused for presenting it under a still different form.

There is, then, in the Gospels, a great deal that requires explanation. The narrative is often imperfect. We do not at once perceive the meaning, relation, and purpose of much, which, we are told,

was said or done by Christ or by others. We cannot, without examination and thought, refer the actions and discourses recorded to that state of mind in the speaker, or to that existing state of things, by which they were occasioned. In order to understand different portions of these books, we are obliged to take into consideration many circumstances not expressly recorded, or not recorded in connection with the portion to be explained. In the careful study of these writings, therefore, we bring together a great variety of facts, which, corresponding with different parts of the narrative, serve to explain what the writers themselves have left unexplained. We regard these in connection with the general view which they have given us of the character of Christ and the purpose of his ministry. We thus obtain something like a full and correct conception of that state of things and series of events, not expressly related, which must have accompanied the ministry of Christ, supposing the truth of what is actually related concerning it. But of this state of things and series of events only a very partial account is given in the Gospels. The narratives in these writings, however, accord with all that we can learn or reasonably infer respecting the subject. But there is

something more to be said. The narratives in the Gospels require, for their explanation, to be considered in connection with all our knowledge concerning the subjects to which they relate. They are but fragments of the great history of the times; and we must complete the tablet, as far as we can, in order to perceive their proper place and connection. Now such a consistency between fiction or error, on the one hand, and truth and probability, on the other, that the latter should be required to explain the former, may fairly be regarded as impossible. If the Gospels were not true, we could not succeed in explaining them by attempting to do so in the manner described ; that is, by proceeding throughout on the false supposition of their being true. In such a case, our facts and inferences, instead of continually affording new illustration, would be continually presenting new contradictions, inconsistencies, and difficulties. This argument applies with peculiar force to the Gospels,—with far greater force than to any other writings whatever; because the Gospels contain accounts of events so extraordinary, and which must have had such important bearings and relations ; and because they are composed so inartificially, the narratives contained in them are so

often imperfect, facts are so nakedly recorded, with so little explanation and so few circumstances, and the relation of different portions to each other, or to what is not stated in the books themselves, is so rarely pointed out. From the nature of the facts related, they are subjected to the strongest test of credibility, and at the same time, from the mode of their relation, there is a constant demand for explanation. We are continually obliged to bring what is before us into comparison with what we know from other sources, or with what we may reasonably or consistently suppose to be true.

It appears, therefore, that the writers of the Gospels had, generally speaking, a very just and lively conception of that most extraordinary state of things, and of those numerous facts and circumstances, which must or which might have existed if their history be true, but which certainly did not exist if it be a fiction. Supposing the truth of the Gospels, the justness of this conception is easily accounted for. It was the result of personal knowledge and experience. Their writers were themselves familiar with the facts relating to the history of Christ, or derived their knowledge from those who were so. But, sup-

posing the Gospels to be narratives not of real, but of fictitious events, then it could have been only by a most vigorous and most singular effort of imagination, that the writers of them thus brought before their minds all the bearings of different portions of these narratives upon a state of things not described, and the numerous particulars and important consequences involved in the supposed truth of the wonderful events which they relate. These writers must, at the same time, have exercised an unaccountable forbearance in leaving the connections and bearings of their narratives so obscure, and in not pointing out or intimating to their readers what might appear to explain or confirm their relations in so striking a manner. The extraordinary faculties supposed, and this extraordinary use of them, must likewise have been found, not in one only, but in four contemporary individuals. But it is useless to multiply objections to an hypothesis so improbable as to give an air of trifling to the arguments brought against it. I will, therefore, only add, that it would imply a fact opposite to the evident and undisputed character of these histories; that is, it would imply that they were works of consummate skill and artifice.

The appearances in the Gospels, if they are

such as have been stated, admit of no other explanation, than that the narratives rest on the authority of those who were witnesses of what is related, and were themselves concerned in the transactions recorded. It follows, therefore, that these histories were committed to writing either by some of the immediate disciples of Christ, or by persons who derived, generally speaking, correct and particular information from such disciples. But if this conclusion be admitted, no important doubt can remain that they are the works of those particular individuals to whom they have always been ascribed. Their character establishes the truth of the testimony to their genuineness.

THE argument which I have endeavored to state is of the kind technically called *cumulative*. Its strength does not appear in any individual case, but in the number and accumulation of instances which may be adduced. Its whole force is to be perceived only by a careful and judicious study of the Gospels. In proportion as they are better understood, the latent marks of truth which run through every part of them will become more apparent and irresistible. All I shall now attempt will be to give a very few examples of its applica-

tion, in order to afford some illustration of its nature.

In the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, we find a narrative which may be thus rendered.

“ That day the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who then is to be greatest in the kingdom of Heaven ? And Jesus called a child to him, and placed him in the midst of them, and said, I tell you in truth, Unless you are changed and become as children, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven. He, then, who shall become humble, and be like this child, will be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. And he who gives a kind reception to one such child for my sake, gives a kind reception to me. But should any one cause the humblest believer in me to fall away from me, it would be better for him that he should have a millstone hung round his neck, and be swallowed up in the depths of the sea. Woe for the world on account of the hindrances to my reception ! Such hindrances must exist; but woe for him through whom they exist !

“ If your hand or your foot would cause you to fall away from me, cut it off and cast it from you.

It is better for you to enter into life having but one foot or one hand, than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire. And if your eye be causing you to fall away, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life having but one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into the fire of hell.

“ See that you despise not any one of the humblest of my disciples ; for I tell you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of my Father in heaven. The Son of Man has come to save the lost. What think you ? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine upon the mountains, and go and seek that which has gone astray ? And if he find it, truly I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine which had not strayed. Even so it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of the humblest of these should be lost.

“ If your brother sin against you, go alone to him and show him his fault. If he listen to you, you have gained your brother. But if he do not listen to you, go to him yet again with one or two others, that everything may be settled by the words of two or three witnesses. And if he dis-

regard them, tell the matter to the assembly of brethren; and if he disregard the assembly, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax-gatherer.

“Truly I say to you, Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven. Again, I say to you, If two of you agree on earth concerning everything which they ask, their prayers will be granted by my Father in heaven. For where two or three have met together in my service, there am I in the midst of them.

“Then Peter came to him and said, Master, if my brother sin against me, how often shall I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus answered him, I say not, Till seven times; but, Till seventy times seven.”

I will now endeavor to explain this narrative, for the purpose of pointing out its intrinsic marks of truth. It has reference to a state of things nowhere described by the Evangelist, but which was the natural result of facts related by him, or known to us from other sources. The narrative forms a counterpart to this state of things. It bears its impression and implies its existence. But this coincidence is clearly undesigned by the

writer. It is not to be ascribed to his skill and artifice. It therefore affords evidence at once of the truth of the narrative itself, and of the actual existence of that state of things which we suppose it to imply. Of this we will now give some account.

It was, as is well known, the general expectation of the Jews, that their Messiah would be a temporal prince, ruling over the world. At the period to which this narrative relates, the Apostles shared in the common error and expectation of their countrymen. Their prejudices and passions clung to this false conception. A little before this time our Saviour had expressly assented to the declaration of Peter affirming him to be the Messiah. His Apostles, therefore, regarding him as sustaining this character, looked forward with undefined hopes to his assuming the power and splendor of the greatest of earthly monarchs. But they had been invited by Christ to connect themselves with him ; they had joined him while he was yet in comparative obscurity and his claims were not generally acknowledged, and they had been distinguished by his peculiar regard. For themselves, therefore, they naturally expected that they should be hereafter among his

favorites and chief officers. With these feelings, they had begun to contend with each other about their future comparative rank in the kingdom of the Messiah. Jealousies had sprung up; mutual offence had been taken; and they were becoming at enmity with each other. Even at a subsequent period, the other disciples, we are told, were moved with indignation at James and John for the ambitious views which they still cherished, notwithstanding our Saviour's present reproof. But all their hopes of worldly ambition were unfounded; and the whole state of mind described was at variance with the character required in the disciples and ministers of him whose kingdom was not of this world.

Our Saviour, therefore, addressing his Apostles, begins with an inculcation of humility, and of the necessity of a total change in their feelings and purposes. Without this, they could not even be members of his kingdom. The bearing of what immediately follows may not be perceived without some further remarks.

Peter, James, and John appear to have been eminent among the Apostles for their personal character. They were, on different occasions, particularly distinguished by Christ. John was

known as the disciple whom he loved. He had declared that Peter was a rock on which he would build his Church. He had selected the three to witness his transfiguration; and upon this occasion, they were separated with their Master during a day and a night from the rest of the Apostles, for a purpose which remained unknown to the latter for a considerable period. They evidently had founded peculiar expectations upon the distinction which they had enjoyed. They appear to have assumed an air of superiority, to which the other disciples were unwilling to submit, and which led to altercation and mutual ill-will. They probably felt and expressed a degree of contempt for the rude and slow conceptions and uninformed minds of some of their associates; perhaps even for their unambitious views, and for a state of feeling and character more conformed to the spirit of our religion than their own. There was probably a rivalship among the three we have mentioned; between Peter, on the one side, and James and John, on the other. It may be presumed, likewise, that the rest of the Apostles shared in the feelings described, according to the notions which they respectively entertained of their claims to the favor of their Master. But this assumption of superior-

ity, these rivalships and dissensions, would tend to alienate many of the disciples, especially those treated as inferiors. They would be offended and driven away from Christ. Our Saviour, therefore, proceeds to speak of the interest which he felt in all his followers. He who should show kindness to any one of them, though he were but as a child, on account of his relation to Christ, might be regarded as showing kindness to Christ himself. He insists in the strongest terms upon the guilt of causing any one of his disciples to be offended with him, or to fall away. There would be sin in apostasy; there would be sin in giving occasion to apostasy. Through either act, one would forfeit the privileges and blessings of a Christian. But there was danger of both; and our Saviour, therefore, speaks of the evil and ruin of such sin. It was to be avoided at any sacrifice, by giving up the strongest feelings and passions, by cutting off a limb or plucking out an eye. He then warns those whom he is addressing, not to despise one of the humblest of his disciples. They were all objects of the care of God. The purpose of his own mission was to seek and save the lost. He had come to rescue men from error, sin, and misery. The deliverance of a single individual,

however humble, was most earnestly to be desired and promoted. God might be regarded as holding the same relation to his disciples, as a shepherd to his flock ; not willing that any should be lost. He then teaches them how to compose those differences which had arisen. The party injured was to seek reconciliation, and endeavor to lead his brother to better feelings. If unsuccessful, he was still to repeat his efforts, taking with him others who might use their influence to the same end. He was finally to call upon the whole body of disciples to interpose their persuasions and authority ; and he who should persevere in ill-will, in opposition to all these means, was no longer to be considered as a brother.

The words which follow are not particularly connected with these directions, but generally with the whole discourse. Our Saviour, having attempted to repress all improper pride and ambition in his disciples, teaches them their real dignity and authority as ministers of his religion. As such they were ministers of God to declare what He forbade and what He commanded. The precepts and directions given by them as announcing his will would be ratified in heaven. The jealousies and dissensions among the Apostles

appear to have arisen in part from what our Saviour had formerly said to Peter: "What you shall forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and what you shall permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."* In the present discourse, in order to do away any claim of superiority which Peter might have founded on this address, and to prevent it from being a ground of dissension, Christ repeats the same words, and extends the declaration to all his Apostles. He then speaks further of their interest with God as ministers of his religion. But he connects this with a new recommendation of concord and unity. As ministers of his religion, they were to be united in their purposes, wishes, and prayers; and they might then be secure of God's peculiar assistance and favor. What they should supplicate in common, as servants of Christ, with such feelings as he required, would be granted by God. It would be as if Christ himself were praying with them.

When we understand the occasion and bearing of the discourse, we perceive, at once, the coincidence in what is related of Peter. "Then Peter came to him and said, Master, if my brother sin

* Matthew xvi. 19.

against me, how often shall I forgive him?" Peter, it is probable, had been particularly exasperated in the controversy concerning pre-eminence; and nothing, in his consequent state of feeling, could be more natural than this question. But this coincidence, like all the others which have been pointed out, is left without being in any way indicated by the Evangelist.

It will be perceived that, in explaining this passage, we go upon the assumption, that the character and office of Christ were such as they are described in the Gospels. We are obliged to suppose that his Apostles had become convinced that he was the Messiah, the most extraordinary messenger from God to men of whom the Jews had an imagination. We next take into view what we learn from other sources was the conception which the Jews had formed of the character and office of the Messiah. We infer that this conception was entertained by the Apostles. We then consider what was the natural effect of their belief upon their minds, in the circumstances in which the history represents them to have been placed. And we bring to bear upon the present passage inferences from facts elsewhere recorded, the connection of which is not pointed out by the

historian. Pursuing this method, we perceive that the narrative is consistent with all that is elsewhere expressly told; and with all that may be inferred from what is told, when viewed in connection with our other knowledge. This consistency extends itself to those relations which are not brought into view by the writer. It is clearly unstudied. But in this passage we have merely a specimen of the sort of illustration which the Gospels throughout admit and require, and of the results which follow from its application.

WE will proceed to another example,—the story of the young man who came to Christ addressing him: “Good teacher, what good thing shall I do to have eternal life?”* The false notions which the Jews entertained of religion and its obligations were similar to those which have very commonly prevailed. They did not regard it as the sole governing principle of the affections and conduct; but rather as enjoining a distinct and peculiar set of observances, a regard to which, though consistent with great moral depravity, was looked upon as constituting the religious character. According

* Matthew xix. 16.

to them, religion consisted in keeping their Law and their traditions. But of the extent and force of the moral requisitions of the Law they had but a very imperfect conception; and to keep the Law was with them but little more than to observe its ceremonies according to the glosses and with the additions of their Rabbins. The case was with them as it has since been with large bodies of Christians. Rites and arbitrary observances had in their minds taken the place of moral duties. The young man who came to Christ, though he may have had some better and higher notions, appears to have possessed in a great degree the common character of his countrymen, and especially of the leading men among them, to whose number he belonged. Regarding our Saviour as a new and extraordinary teacher, he appears to have thought that he might enjoin upon him some new and peculiar observance as a means of obtaining God's favor; something not commanded in the Law, and which others had not practised.

To the address of the young man our Saviour replied: "Why do you call me good? None is good except God alone. But if you would enter into life, keep the commandments." The

object of the first part of our Saviour's answer was to refer the young man from himself as a teacher, to God ; to give him to understand that no precepts were of any authority except as they proceeded from God ; that there was no other *good* teacher to whom he was to look for directions by which eternal life might be obtained. Accordingly, the purport of what he adds is this : If you would enter into life, obey the commandments of God. The subsequent question of the young man implies, conformably to what has been said, that he was seeking for some peculiar, and, if I may so say, some compendious mode of obtaining future blessedness ; for he asks which of the commandments he should keep, as if there were no obligation to obey them all. Our Saviour, then, in opposition to the common error of the age, directs him to the *moral* precepts of the Law, mentioning particularly a few of these, as specimens and representatives of the whole. The young man, with a confidence which discovered too high an opinion of himself and too narrow conceptions of his duty, replied, "All these precepts have I kept from my youth ; in what am I still wanting ?" Our Saviour's preceding answer was not intended as a full reply. There

was, now that he had come as a messenger from God, an occasion and a call for high virtues and great sacrifices, such as had not previously been demanded. Men were summoned to become his disciples, and his disciples were to take up the cross and follow him ; to give themselves up to his cause ; to lay aside all regard to their worldly interests ; and to expose themselves as marks for persecution. Our Saviour proposed to the young man no easier and no harder terms than he proposed to all his followers. The excellence, he tells him, of which you are ambitious, is to be obtained by devoting yourself to my service, by becoming my follower ; but to this end it is necessary to divest yourself of all care for merely earthly concerns. The direction at first sight may seem to be severe, and to have imposed an unnecessary trial ; and it is left unexplained by the Evangelist. But when we bring into view the existing state of things, we find it to be such as this state of things demanded ; and we perceive its consistency with what was uniformly required by Christ of his disciples.

The young man went away sorrowful, and our Saviour turned to his disciples to remark, in the strong, figurative language of the East, upon the

moral impossibility that those of the class to which he belonged should give up wealth, ease, pleasures, and honors, to become his disciples. But their thoughts still dwelt upon an earthly kingdom; and could this hold out no rewards to tempt men to become his followers? Was the whole course of his disciples through life to be one of privation, labor, and suffering? "Who then," they ask, "can be saved?" That is, How are you to collect followers? How is your kingdom to be established? — It is to this indirect meaning of the question, I conceive, that the reply of Christ is directed. Men would be saved, his religion would be established, not by human means, but by displays of the power of God.

Peter then, with feelings similar to those which have been before described, brings forward the claims of the Apostles: "Lo! we have left all to become your followers. What then will be our reward?" Our Saviour answers him in strong, metaphorical language, borrowing the figure which he uses from the thoughts which possessed their minds. "And Jesus said to them, I tell you in truth, that you, my followers, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, shall also sit on twelve

thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”* It was thus that he not unfrequently adopted the language in which his hearers might express their ideas, and conformed it to the expression of his own ; in this manner facilitating the reception of the latter by their minds. The expectations of his Apostles would not be literally gratified, but they would be gratified in a much higher sense. When men should be regenerated by his religion, when his spiritual kingdom should be established, they, his Apostles, would be regarded as next to him in authority and dignity. For all their sacrifices, he proceeds to say, they should receive a hundred fold, and should inherit eternal life.

But the parable which follows, of the laborers in a vineyard, is intended to correct any false hopes, improper confidence, or undue estimation of themselves, which these promises might otherwise have excited in the Apostles. They might naturally think that the mere circumstance of their early adherence to our Saviour, their being his first, or among his first, followers, would

* It having been in ancient times common in the East for kings to act as judges, the whole exercise of regal authority was sometimes denoted by the word *judging*, as it is metaphorically in the present passage. “The twelve tribes of Israel” is a figurative expression for the whole people of God.

entitle them to peculiar rewards. This might reasonably be expected by the followers of an earthly leader. But the object of this parable was to teach them that the future recompense of men would not be affected by their becoming his followers early or late, if they became such as soon as invited. It would depend only on their moral excellence. In this respect many of those who became converts at a later period might be superior to others who earlier professed themselves his disciples. The last might be first, and the first last.

IN explaining the passages which we have gone over, we are obliged to suppose much that is nowhere expressly stated by the Evangelist. But what we suppose, follows from what he has related, when we view his history in connection with our knowledge derived from other sources. It is of this remarkable, unobtruded, apparently unstudied consistency, that he who denies the truth of the history is called upon to furnish some other solution.*

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* [For further illustration of the passages remarked upon in this chapter, see the author's Notes on the Gospels.]

CHAPTER II.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE CONSISTENCY OF THE NARRATIVE
CONSIDERED.

WE have been endeavoring to prove the truth of the Gospel history from the consistency of its different parts with each other, with the whole, and with all our knowledge bearing upon the subject in numberless dependences and relations. This consistency, when viewed in connection with the inartificial style of narration, gives the history an air of truth which human skill and genius seem scarcely more capable of counterfeiting, than they are of counterfeiting one of the living productions of nature. But it may be said that there is an important point in which the argument fails, and may be turned against us. It may be urged that the effect produced by the ministry of Christ upon the great body of the Jewish nation was wholly inconsistent with what we might reasonably expect, supposing his history to be true. Though performing the most astonish-

ing miracles in attestation of his divine authority, he was unable to subdue the incredulity of his countrymen. It is impossible, it may be said, that men's minds should not have yielded to such proofs as he is related to have given.

Certainly, if the Gospel history be true, Jesus Christ did give the most unquestionable proofs of his divine mission. But it is an error to suppose that men will always believe and act as it is in the highest degree reasonable that they should believe and act. Our passions and prejudices have power to trample the strongest evidence under foot. The Pharisees and the common people whose leaders they were, refused to acknowledge the divine authority of our Saviour. One, at first thought, may be ready to say that nothing can be imagined more unreasonable. Yet no form which their opinions concerning Christ might assume, could involve so gross an absurdity as the doctrine of transubstantiation. In whatever they might believe, there was, to say the least, no greater dereliction of reason, than in the belief of this article of faith. They persecuted Christ and his followers in defence of their opinions;—but those who have held that doctrine have persecuted as madly in its support. They may appear to

have rushed upon destruction, struggling against evidence which should have produced conviction. It is an awful and revolting phenomenon. But it is one which has been exhibited since their times. The voice of reason and religion and conscience has been often distinctly uttered to men without being heard and obeyed. The truth is, that when we suppose an extraordinary difficulty in the case of the unbelieving Jews, we regard nothing but the abstract force of the evidence for the divinity of our Saviour's mission, supposing it to be such as is represented in the Gospels. We do not consider those circumstances which may have produced in their minds a very false estimate of the weight of this evidence; nor take into view the strength of those prejudices, passions, and vices, that whole constitution of character, by which it was resisted.

If it be proved that Christ performed real miracles, no reasonable man, at the present day, will doubt that he was a messenger from God. But in the time of Christ, this conclusion did not necessarily follow in the mind of a Jew. That the power of performing miracles, that is, of producing effects which cannot be referred to the laws of nature, must in all cases, when viewed

alone, be sufficient evidence that he in whom it resides has received some commission from God, is a proposition which, perhaps, admits of satisfactory proof. This proof, however, is derived from various and complex considerations; and the truth of the proposition, whether in this abstract form it may be established or not, was certainly not generally admitted by the Jews contemporary with Christ. They were an ignorant and superstitious people. The prevalent belief in the reality of false miracles existed among them equally as among the Heathens. Some narratives in their Scriptures might easily be understood as proving the doctrine, that the power of performing miracles was not confined to the messengers of God, or to those on whom he looked with favor. They believed in the agency of evil spirits as interfering with the course of nature and inflicting diseases of body and mind. There were persons among them who were regarded as able to cure such diseases by casting out dæmons. They believed in magic, and consequently had no doubt that miracles might be effected through means and agents condemned by God, and which exposed those who employed them to his displeasure. But, holding such false opinions, they were fully prepared to resist the

conviction which the miracles of our Saviour must have produced in men more intelligent and better informed. They were familiar with the imagination and belief of false miracles, and were therefore less likely to be affected by real miracles. Believing such effects to be often produced without the interposition of God, by bad agents, they were furnished with what they deemed a sufficient account of the miracles of Christ, though his divine authority were denied. His enemies held the same opinion concerning them, which many Christians have held respecting the pretended miracles of Paganism. They regarded them as performed through the assistance of evil spirits. In addition to what has been said, it may be well to recollect, though it is not a consideration of primary importance, that the principal scene of Christ's ministry was in Galilee and the neighboring country, and that it was here that most of his miracles were performed; while, on the other hand, the stronghold of his enemies was at Jerusalem, where his character, preaching, and actions were less known.

But the majority of the Jews were not likely to be deterred from their opinion respecting the miraculous powers of Christ, either by the holi-

ness of his character, or by the conformity of his doctrines and precepts to our highest conceptions of God. In order to perceive and feel the display of divine excellence which was manifested in his life and religion, no inconsiderable degree of purity and elevation of mind is required. Moral corruption must shrink from it with aversion and pain. Instead, therefore, of commanding the respect of his countrymen, it was one cause of their offence with him and their hatred against him. But there were other powerful causes in operation.

The Jews were oppressed by the Roman power, and despised and exasperated by their oppressors. Insulated among nations, not less by mutual feelings of hostility than by other causes, they gloried in their peculiar relation to God. They were his people, and the rest of men were their enemies and his enemies. Their pride was their consolation and their hope; and the more they were humbled, the more obstinate and deep-rooted it became. It drew strength from all their national and all their religious sentiments. The hour was coming, as they thought, when God would interpose for his chosen people, and destroy their oppressors. The times of the Messiah would be a period of deliverance and vengeance and glory.

This expectation was an article of religious faith, and the cherished object of their strongest passions. But when Christ appeared, it was to prostrate those hopes, and humble that pride which oppression and suffering had only confirmed. No distinguishing favor of God to the Jewish people was manifested through him. He came to teach them, that they were not, as they believed, a holy people, but sinners and aliens from God ; and that it was only by a renovation of character that they could obtain his favor. He came, not to exalt them in triumph over their enemies, but to place the rest of men on an equality with them, to do away the distinctions in which they had gloried, and to make known the impartial goodness of God. He came, not to gratify their passions, but to require them to relinquish those passions. No shock or discouragement, however, could at once subdue those strong hopes which his appearance had called forth. Though unsatisfied, there were still some of their number who were ready, with, or even without, his consent, "to make him king." But he repelled from him those who came with such feelings. He turned into hostility the passions which he refused to gratify. At the same time, the place of his birth, the condition of his

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family, his mode of life, the character of his few followers, the hopes which he held out to them, were all foreign from what they had expected in their great Deliverer. Was it strange, then, that they refused to acknowledge him as the Messiah, who corresponded to none of their conceptions of the Messiah, and who, instead of accomplishing, had come to destroy, the hopes of his nation ?

But this was not all. Jesus Christ was, in the highest sense of the words, a moral and religious reformer, the most open and uncompromising, exposed to all the hatred which may ever attach to this character. The Jewish religion had become grossly corrupt. It was, as other forms of superstition have been, little more than a religion of substitutions for holiness and virtue ; not leading men to goodness, but furnishing them with some other imaginary means of obtaining the favor of God. Now when, in any case, a reformer exhibits the true character of such substitutions, and presents to view the real requirements of religion, the natural effect will be, that those who have founded their pride upon the former will regard him as profanely endeavoring to destroy men's reverence for what is sacred. He will be viewed by them as an enemy to religion ; for he is an enemy to

what they have thought religion. They will regard him with deep-felt hostility ; for he is destroying the support of their self-satisfaction, and of their estimation among men. Their worst passions will be arrayed by their bigotry in the disguise of religious zeal. This was eminently true as regards the Jews. With what feelings must the Pharisees have heard a teacher, who, assuming the most decisive tone of authority, announced to them that they were hypocrites and sinners, deceiving themselves and their followers ? How must they have listened to one who called upon them to acquire that holiness which they had no doubt of already possessing, through the hard way of humility, repentance, and entire change of character ? How many of them could be expected to become the disciples of such a teacher ? And what must have been the bitterness and exasperation of those who did not ! In what state of mind were they to estimate fairly the evidence of his divine mission ? Their strongest passions were exasperated ; their most deep-rooted prejudices were assailed ; and the whole force of these was turned against him. Even their wavering apprehensions, if any such were felt, that his claims might be well-founded, only served to increase their alarm and

agitation, and, consequently, to give new strength to the feelings which they had not power to subdue. The state of mind which existed in the Pharisees must have been common in some degree to most of the Jews. The system of doctrines and duties taught by Christ was at variance with the inveterate errors of his countrymen. The alternative was, whether, becoming as children, they should surrender these errors, having implicit faith in Christ as teaching by the authority of God; or whether they should cling to and defend them, regarding him as an impious innovator. The latter was the character which many of the Jews ascribed to Christ. The fact is evident from his own discourses. It accounts for the frequency and force with which he insisted on his connection with God as His messenger and representative; and for the variety of forms in which he presented this truth. It is clear that his enemies were under such a strong delusion, as to imagine themselves defending against him the cause of God and of God's people. Their feelings of hostility broke out repeatedly with particular violence, when, by an intentional disregard of those ceremonies which they thought of high importance, particularly a superstitious observance

of the Sabbath, he showed of how little account he esteemed them. An enemy of their faith, a despiser of their traditions, one who made no account of that scrupulousness of conscience which paid tithes even of mint and cumin, but who denounced as hypocrites those holy men whose authority had been most respected; a teacher who taught not as those who had made the Law their study; a contemner of religious ceremonies; a breaker of the Sabbath; a companion of tax-gatherers and sinners; a pretended Messiah who came not to deliver God's chosen people, but as a prophet of evil, denouncing the destruction even of Jerusalem and the temple,—it was thus that a bigoted Jew must have regarded Christ; and what strength of evidence could prove to him that such a one was a messenger from God? “He casts out the daemons through the prince of the daemons.” This was not a mere timid solution of the difficulty which his miracles presented; it was the strong expression of the feelings which possessed those by whom it was uttered.

It is a gross error to suppose that miracles are particularly adapted to affect the minds of a rude and superstitious people. They will produce their most powerful impression upon the most enlight-

ened,—upon those who have the most correct conceptions of the power and character of God, the most extensive acquaintance with the causes of natural phenomena, who are most free from credulity, and who, in consequence, are not familiarized to the imagination and belief of false miracles. To such, a real miracle must be an astonishing and almost appalling event, commanding attention, and affording ground for the strongest conviction. By the ignorant and superstitious it may be regarded as merely belonging to a class of phenomena of not very unfrequent occurrence.

WHEN, therefore, we attend to the character, opinions, and state of mind of those whom Christ addressed, we perceive that the result of his ministry was such as we might reasonably expect to find it. I do not urge this coincidence as any evidence of the truth of his history; for, whether the rest of the history be true or false, there could be but one statement respecting a fact, in its nature so notorious. My purpose has hitherto been merely to remove an objection.

BUT the statements which have been made for this purpose may be viewed under a different as-

pect. There is, running through the Gospels, a striking correspondence with the representations which have been given. It is nowhere implied in these books, that any doubt was entertained of the reality of Christ's miracles. There is not a single expression which betrays any apprehension or thought of their truth being denied. There is no attempt to establish it by arguments, by the refutation of objections, or by any detail of circumstances having a bearing upon this point. The facts are told nakedly, as equally indisputable and undisputed. But this is not all. There are repeated implications, apparently indirect and unstudied, that the reality of Christ's miracles was universally acknowledged, equally by those who did not recognize them as evidences of his divine mission and by those who did. There are, at the same time, repeated exhibitions of the workings of those passions and prejudices which have been supposed. Such, for instance, is the case in the account which the Pharisees are represented to have given of the manner in which Christ's miracles were performed, taken in connection with the subsequent remarks of Christ upon what they said.* The whole narrative implies that there was

* Compare Matthew ix. 34; xii. 24, seqq.

no controversy about the facts themselves. That the words ascribed to the Pharisees were not falsely ascribed to them is further confirmed, it may be observed, by an incidental allusion to them, made by Christ: "If they have called the master of the house Beëlzebub, how much more will they so call those of his household!"* A like indirect acknowledgment of the reality of his miracles, and the operation of a like state of mind, appear in what was said by his fellow-townsman of Nazareth while refusing to acknowledge his divine authority: "Whence has this man such wisdom, and these mighty powers? Is he not the son of the carpenter?"† Similar remarks may be made respecting the request of the Pharisees that he would give "a sign from HEAVEN." They would not have asked a sign from heaven of one whom they regarded as a mere impostor, not possessed of any extraordinary powers. If they could have exposed any deception in his miracles performed on earth, they would not have sought to put him to a new trial. The implication is that these miracles were unsatisfactory; and that it was necessary for him to give some more decisive proof of his divine mission, by a sign coming evidently from Him

* Matthew x. 25.

† Matthew xiii. 54, 55.

whom they conceived of as dwelling in the heavens. I give these passages merely as examples. A similar character appears more or less distinctly in many others.*

The remark that the miracles of Christ appear from the Gospels to have been unquestioned, is true of what may be more strictly called *his* miracles. But it is not true of the fact of his resurrection. Respecting this, St. Matthew relates that there was a story in circulation that his disciples came by night and stole his body away while the guards slept.† The effect of this single exception is to confirm the argument derived from the general characteristic of the Gospels before mentioned. Here we are told by the Evangelist, that the most important miracle which he records was treated as an imposture. We may fairly conclude, therefore, that with the same honesty, or the same indifference, or the same incapacity for deception, he would, in some way, have given us information of the fact, if the truth of the other miracles recorded by him had been called in question. What he here expressly states confirms most strongly the

* Some of these are mentioned by Paley. (Evidences, Part III. ch. iv.)

† Matthew xxviii. 12, seqq.

correctness of those accounts which *imply* that their truth was not disputed. But in what manner does he mention this particular story of the unbelieving Jews? He merely states it, without any attempt at refutation, without even a formal denial of it, without a single remark respecting it. He could not have treated it with more indifference, or with more appearance of regarding it as destitute equally of plausibility and of truth, and wholly unlikely to obtain credit. If the story had been urged with any confidence, if it had been in fact believed by those who brought it forward, it could hardly have been passed over with such slight.

It appears then, that, with the exception just mentioned, the writers of the Gospels nowhere imply that any doubt was professed or entertained of the reality of the miracles which they relate; but, on the contrary, that the enemies of Christ admitted the fact of his supernatural powers. Now this is a remarkable characteristic of these histories, which corresponds to the supposition of their truth, but does not correspond to any other supposition that can be made. If we suppose the histories to be false, and that Christ did not perform miracles, there are but three suppositions

of which the case admits : one, That he falsely pretended to have this power ; another, That though he himself did not pretend to this power, yet his disciples believed him to possess it, and to have, in fact, performed many miracles ; and the third, That though Christ neither pretended to this power, nor was believed by his disciples to possess it, yet miracles were falsely attributed to him after his death. The second supposition may appear too improbable to be stated ; nor should I have thought of bringing it forward, if it had not actually been maintained. We may say, generally, that the pretence that Christ performed miracles was either made during his lifetime by himself or by his disciples ; or, not being then urged, was brought forward after his death. In either case, if it had admitted of dispute or denial, there can be no doubt that it would have been disputed and denied. If there had been room even for any cavil or objection, it would have been made. If his miracles had been false, the personal enemies of Christ, or, subsequently to his time, the enemies of the rising sect, would have seized at once upon this decisive ground of attack. It would have been the universal objection of the opposers of Christianity. It is unnecessary to my

present purpose to observe, that the objection must have been triumphant, and that it is impossible that such a series of bold and gross fictions as would have existed in the Gospels could have stood their ground, at once against the truth and against violent opposition. I only say, that these relations would have been met on every side with doubts, and strong controversy, and positive denial. The opposers of Christianity did not think themselves destitute of arguments against it; and they urged them strenuously and confidently. What they were, we learn not merely from the Gospels, but equally from the Epistles and from other sources. The first preachers of our religion were continually called upon to meet and answer them. There is, however, no indication that the reality of the miracles was disputed. But if this could have been denied, here would have been the tug and strain of the controversy. Upon his miracles the Founder of our religion is represented as having rested his claims: "If I had not done among them such works as no other ever did, they would not be thus guilty." The first and the last objection to his claims, therefore, would have been, that such works were not performed by him. But if a controversy of the kind we have supposed had

really existed, we should have found, I do not say traces, but abundant and decisive proofs of it in the Gospels, as well as in other writings of early Christians. It would have been impossible that such a series of extraordinary narratives, relating to a subject of such deep interest, should have been presented naked to the attacks of unbelievers and enemies, without an attempt to support their authority, or to invalidate the statements of those who denied their truth, and even without any reference to those opposite accounts which must have been notorious to all who cared about the facts in question. The writers of these histories were treading upon ground where they were exposed to continual attack, and must have been constantly in armor. On the contrary, they proceed with the most unaffected air of security. Not only are there no traces in their books of any controversy respecting the reality of Christ's miracles, but there runs throughout these writings an implication that no doubt of their reality was entertained. Now this could not be consummate artifice, though it might tend to deceive readers at the distance of eighteen centuries; but it must have been consummate folly, for it could deceive no readers at the time when the books appeared.

It is a folly, however, of which no writers placed in such circumstances as were the Evangelists can be supposed guilty. The characteristic of which we have been speaking implies, therefore, the truth of their history; and it admits of explanation on no other hypothesis. It is a mark of authenticity which cannot be artificial, but which runs, like the natural veins of an agate, through the very structure of their writings.

The argument may be thus simply stated. If the reality of Christ's miracles could have been controverted, this would have been the main controversy between Christians and their opponents. If such a controversy had existed, we should have found proofs of it in the writings of the early Christians, and especially in the Gospels. But no such proofs are to be found; on the contrary, we perceive decisive implications that the reality of his miracles was not denied. It follows, that no such controversy existed. The reality of his miracles was not, because it could not be, denied; and the narrative of them is therefore true.

THE history contained in the Gospels may be divided into two parts: one, containing narratives of miraculous events; and the other, accounts of

the discourses of our Saviour, of his actions not miraculous, and of the dispositions, words, and actions of others,—his friends, his enemies, and the common multitude. Now between these two portions into which the history may be divided, there is a perfect correspondence. That our Saviour was a divine messenger endued with miraculous powers is brought into view with almost as much distinctness in one portion of the narrative as in the other. This fact appears in his always demanding to be believed and obeyed simply upon his own authority, as speaking in the name of God; in his appeals to his miracles as the proof on which his claims rested; in his forcibly presenting to the minds of his disciples the sufferings to be endured by them in this life, and giving nothing but his own promise for the rewards to be expected by them after death; in the distant and submissive respect with which they regarded him; in the very extraordinary effects produced by his ministry; in the strong disposition of the Jews to believe him to be their Messiah, notwithstanding the opposition between his life and actions and their previous conceptions; in the other opinions entertained concerning him, “some saying that he was John the Baptist; others, Elijah;

and others, Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets"; in the multitudes that attended him, amounting at one time, and that in a desert place, to five thousand men, besides women and children,—an assembly of Galilæan Jews, which could not have been drawn together to hear a mere philosopher expounding a refined system of religion and morals; in those indirect acknowledgments of the truth of his miracles to which we have just adverted; and, generally, in the correspondence of his whole character, and of all his actions, doctrines, and precepts, to the conception of a supernatural messenger from God,—a subject to be explained more fully hereafter. Nor is this all; the fact of his being endued with miraculous powers is clearly implied in various particular passages of the Gospels, not to be referred to any of the heads just mentioned. Allowing the truth of this fact, the whole history is consistent and probable. But if the accounts of Christ's miracles be false, then the remainder of the history must, generally speaking, be false also. It consists of narratives of actions and discourses, which, upon this supposition, become absurd, improbable, or necessarily untrue. It cannot, therefore, be said that the accounts of the miracles are false, but that the rest of the history is true.

There is such a consistency and intimate correspondence between the different portions of the narrative, that the whole, generally speaking, must be false, or the whole must be true.

No reasonable man, however, will contend that the history is merely fictitious, that there was no groundwork of facts for the narrative in the Gospels, and that no such person as Christ existed. What seems to be regarded as the most plausible supposition, by those who deny the truth of the Gospel history, is this: That a very enlightened philosopher made his appearance in Galilee, whose purpose was to reform the religion and morals of the Jews, and perhaps of the rest of the world; but that his character and claims have been extravagantly misrepresented, and that the narrative of his life has been interpolated with strange fables. But to this or any other supposition which denies the truth of the miracles, the consistency of the history presents a conclusive objection. If the general representation given by the Evangelists of the character, office, and miracles of Christ had been false, it would have been impossible for such writers as they were to imagine a probable story of a series of events such as must have followed upon the supposition of its truth; a story

consistent not merely with itself, but with all that we can learn respecting the history and circumstances of the times to which it refers. If their narratives had not been true, they must have presented a very different aspect from what they now bear. They would have been full of incongruities, inconsistencies in the representation of character, and latent and obvious contradictions both of known facts and of statements contained in the narratives themselves.

According to the supposition which we are considering, Jesus Christ was not the Jewish Messiah, nor did he claim to be; he was not a messenger from God, in any proper sense of those words, nor did he assume that character; he had not the power of performing miracles, nor did he pretend to this power. Yet we have a consistent story, corresponding to a directly opposite conception of his character. This story, then, must be a work of invention, a product of human art and genius. But there could not well have been a more difficult subject for invention. Allowing it, however, to be one capable of execution, it is clear that neither of the four Evangelists possessed the intellectual powers and habits necessary for this extraordinary task. A groundwork of real facts,

instead of assisting them in their fiction, would only have embarrassed the subject, and rendered it more difficult and unmanageable. These facts would have been continually forcing themselves into notice, and obstructing the free exercise of invention. There would have been evident at first sight a strange mixture of heterogeneous materials in their narrative. We may say, therefore, that, supposing the Evangelists to have set out with the original conception of a divine messenger endued with miraculous powers, and placed in such circumstances as those in which Christ is represented to have been, it must have been a work of most extraordinary genius to *imagine* a thoroughly consistent and probable account of his ministry; and the necessity of conforming this account to a series of real facts, and of distorting natural events with their consequences into supernatural events with their appropriate consequences, would only have aggravated the difficulty. But such a consistent and probable story we do possess in each of the Gospels; and the only alternative seems to be, that it is either true, or that it is, what no one will believe, a most uncommon production of skill and genius on the part of the respective authors of these works. To suppose such a consistent

narrative to be formed by collecting traditions, fables, and exaggerated stories, invented and propagated by many individuals deceiving and deceived, is like imagining a fine historical picture to be composed by putting together figures and designs, the work of different unskilful artists, each following his own fancy.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST AS IT APPEARS IN THE
GOSPELS.

SECTION I.

His Teaching.

THE perfect exhibition of moral excellence in the teaching and actions of Christ has been often urged as an intrinsic proof of the divinity of his mission. I am about to apply this consideration in a somewhat different manner, and to use it as a proof of the genuineness of the writings in which his character appears, and which profess to afford a record of what he taught.

The argument is this. The Gospels contain an exhibition of character, real or imaginary, incomparably more wonderful than is to be found in any other writings. It is the character of a messenger from God, assuming in his name the highest authority, constantly exercising supernatural powers, and appearing among men for the purpose of

making them acquainted with God, with their own immortal nature, with their duty, and with those ennobling and awful sanctions by which it is enforced. He is represented as discovering to men a perfect system of religion. He always appears, whether teaching, or acting, or suffering, as displaying the highest excellence. His character is everywhere consistent with itself and with the supernatural dignity of his office, though he is represented as passing through scenes the most trying and humiliating. We have, then, in these writings, a just conception of a perfect system of religion, as taught by a divine teacher, assuming the highest authority and exercising the most extraordinary powers, and displaying throughout a character in which we discover nothing but what is excellent and sublime.

But the writers of the Gospels derived those conceptions which we find in their works, either from reality, or from their own imaginations. If we allow the former part of this alternative, the fact that the writings are genuine may, as we shall see hereafter, be rendered in the highest degree probable, though, at the same time, the question of their genuineness becomes comparatively unimportant. But if it be contended that these writers

did not draw from reality, but from imagination,—that they are not simple historians, but that their narratives are fiction,—the answer to this supposition is, that the conceptions of moral excellence and sublimity which we find displayed and embodied in their writings would imply a transcendent genius and force of mind, to which there is no parallel, which it is impossible should have existed in four anonymous, unknown authors, and which are irreconcilable with the actual want of extraordinary talents, and of skill in composition, that is discovered in their works. These conceptions likewise would imply a correctness of moral principle, and a purity and sublimity of moral feeling, which could not exist in union with intentional falsehood. The argument, therefore, is briefly this: That the religion and morality of the Gospels, as exhibited in the doctrines, precepts, and life of Christ, are such as could not have been conceived and represented by the writers of the Gospels, if they had not had a living archetype before them; and that, without such an archetype, the power of conceiving and representing what we find in the Gospels, if it ever existed in any human being, would necessarily imply that that extraordinary being had a character which

entitled him to perfect confidence. It was wholly out of the power of the writers of the Gospels to deceive us as they must have done, supposing their representations false; and the very existence of such a power, in any case, would in itself imply the absence of all will to deceive. The intrinsic character of these writings, therefore, affords positive evidence of their authenticity as to all essential facts, and consequently, as we shall see, strong evidence of their genuineness.

LET us consider more particularly what we find in the Gospels. According to these histories, at a period when what we now regard as true religion had no existence upon earth, when only some rude and very imperfect notions of morality found their way to the multitude, and when, in consequence, the mass of men were extremely debased, ignorant, and vicious, there appeared a teacher who took upon himself the reformation of mankind. He appeared among the Jews, a nation who were far from sharing in the common intellectual improvement of their heathen neighbors; who probably, with some exceptions, were as depraved as the rest of the world; and whose religion, originally derived from God, had become full of error and

corruption. He was a young man, born in the lower class of the people, and brought up in Galilee. I mention this latter circumstance, because Galilee had a sort of provincial relation to Judæa; and the proper Jews regarded the Galilæans as inferior to themselves. He had not been educated even in the common learning of his nation. Yet, amid the ignorance and depravity with which he was surrounded, he developed a system of religion and morals blended together and exhibited in their proper relations, nothing like which had ever been made known before, and which, since it has been made known, human reason has been wholly unable to improve.

WHAT, then, were the great characteristics of the preaching of Christ, the fundamental principles which were continually appearing in his discourses? I answer, that he spoke of God, of eternity, and of our relations to our fellow-creatures.

He spoke of God. His countrymen had been accustomed to regard the Almighty as the partial God of their nation, and the severe judge and enemy of the rest of the world. Their language was: "Among all the multitudes of people, thou,

O Lord, hast gotten thee one people." "Thou madest the world for our sakes. As for the other people who also come of Adam, thou hast said that they are nothing."* He taught, that "God had so loved THE WORLD as to give his only Son, that every one" (whether Jew or Gentile) "believing in him should not perish, but have eternal life." He presented to view a conception of God, accommodated to the weakness of our nature, but which may exhaust the strength of the human intellect in its contemplation. He taught his hearers to regard Him as our Father in heaven, caring for us with more than parental care. "If you, then, though evil, give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give what is good to those who ask him!" He spoke of that invisible energy of God which is ever in action, which clothes the flowers of the field in beauty, and without which a sparrow falls not to the ground. He taught his disciples to trust in Him as a Being whose providence nothing escapes, by whom even the hairs of their heads were numbered. In his preaching, our intimate relation to God was continually recognized and insisted upon. He repre-

* 2 Esdras v. 27; vi. 55, 56.

sented Him as the moral governor of mankind, with all knowledge and all power to effect His purposes. "He sees what is done in secret, and will reward openly." His will must be the rule of our conduct. "Not every one who says to me, Master, Master, will enter the kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven." We are familiar with these words, and they may not at first affect us with all their force. But let us examine them, and we shall find that we can form no higher and juster conception of the manner in which a messenger from God to men ought to express himself. They enforce in the strongest terms the necessity of moral virtue as the one thing required to obtain the favor of God, and at the same time convey in the most unaffected manner an impression of the exalted and peculiar dignity of the speaker, and of his complete freedom from all selfish purposes.

Jesus Christ taught that obedience to God should be a principle of moral conduct maintaining supreme authority in the mind, and annihilating, as it were, every consideration which might come in competition with it, whatever its power to allure or to terrify,—the love of life and its enjoyments, the dread of suffering and of death;—and

he enforced this requirement in a manner the most solemn and impressive. "I say to you, my friends, Fear not those who kill the body, and after this can do nothing more; but I will instruct you whom to fear: fear Him who has power, after taking away life, to cast into hell; yea, I say to you, fear Him."

This, then, is one distinguishing characteristic of the preaching of Jesus Christ, as it is represented by the Evangelists. He continually insists upon a regard to God and his moral government, as the fundamental principle of conduct. Upon this principle all our moral affections and habits are to be founded. The first doctrine of religion, as taught by Christ, is, that God is to be loved with the whole heart and mind. The whole moral nature of man is to be under the government of those affections and principles which result from just conceptions of the Deity, and of our relation to him. If you would detach this truth from the other instructions of Jesus, you must break to pieces and destroy the whole fabric of his religion, leaving nothing but disconnected fragments.

BUT the being who is thus intimately related to God,— how is he to regard himself, and how long

is this relation to continue ? It will continue for ever ; he is to regard himself as immortal. We listen to the preaching of Jesus Christ, and the arch of heaven which closed over us, and limited our view to a few objects of this world, rolls away ; all that before surrounded us contracts to a span, and an unlimited prospect is disclosed of scenes the most solemn and splendid, on which we are just about to enter. He continually addresses man as a being of unmeasured powers, who may, nay, who must, indulge in the most glorious expectations, who must act habitually under a consciousness of his immortality. Look upon the world in which Jesus Christ appeared. It was filled with men sensual, ignorant, debased by their superstitions, driven about at the mercy of every passion, unconscious of their nature, engrossed by the objects of this life, scarcely thinking of anything better, and lifting their eyes to contemplate the future only to see death always presenting itself as the termination of all those prospects and pursuits in which they were most strongly interested. To men such as these, he announced that they were beings of an incomparably higher order than they had imagined themselves ; and that their true interests were of a kind of which they had hardly

formed a conception. In his preaching, death almost disappeared from view as something unworthy of regard. "He who puts his trust in me has eternal life." "He has passed from death to life." "Whoever obeys my teaching will never see death."

A short time before his crucifixion, this most extraordinary teacher is represented as having been present with the sisters of a friend whom he loved, and whom they had just laid in the grave. There was everything in their expressions of simple and warm affection, of deep reverence, and of entire trust in his kindness though he had seemed to neglect them, to affect the feelings of one who knew and felt that they who thus loved him were soon to be filled with distress and agony by the horrors of his death, and that to himself all human sympathy would soon only be a new source of pain. He was deeply affected. The whole story is told with perfect nature, and the most touching simplicity. On this occasion, just before presenting himself at that tomb from which he was to recall the dead, he is represented as declaring, "I am the resurrection and eternal life. He who has faith in me, though he die, will live; and whoever lives and has faith in me will never die."

It may be said, that these words were never uttered; it may be said, that the character of Christ as displayed in the Gospels is a fiction, and that there is little satisfactory ground for expecting any other existence than the present. Let us allow all this for a moment, and consider what follows. If this be so, then the whole narrative, the ascribing to this supposed personage the declaration which I have quoted, under such circumstances, is a conception the most affecting and sublime that ever entered the human mind. It blends together and concentrates in a single sentence the annunciation of a doctrine of the most absorbing interest, and a claim of undefined and overwhelming superiority; and the expression is at once the most striking and unaffected. We may search long in all poetry and eloquence before we shall discover a parallel to this transcendent burst of genius. It implies an energy of imagination and feeling, which I know not where we shall find displayed except in the Gospels themselves.

BUT Jesus Christ did not inculcate the doctrine of immortality merely as a subject of delightful contemplation. He did not teach, as did some of

the wisest of the ancient philosophers, that, should we exist hereafter, we should certainly exist to be happy. He did not teach anything analogous to what was the prevailing doctrine in his own nation, that all the descendants of Israel were, as such, secure of the favor of God. He always exhibited the doctrine of immortality in connection with that of the moral government of God; and thus laid an immovable foundation for the highest and most unworldly virtue. This, then, is another characteristic of his preaching. In addressing men as moral agents, he always addresses them as immortal beings. There is in this respect a perfect consistency in his preaching. He never forgets himself so as to speak as if he were addressing mere creatures of this world. The virtue which he required is not the sort of prudential morality which may be learned from the experience of life, but virtue springing from a sense of our relations to God and to eternity. Nothing can be more admirable, and, if we are indeed immortal, nothing can be more reasonable, than the calm, decided, and, if I may so speak, peremptory manner in which he required that the strongest fears and hopes of the present life should give way without resistance to those which regard eternity. "Let

him who would be my follower renounce himself, and come after me, bearing his cross. For he who would save his life, will lose it; and he who may lose his life for my sake, will secure it. What advantage would it be to a man, to gain the whole world with the loss of his life?" "BLESSED will you be when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all evil against you, falsely, for my sake. REJOICE AND EXULT; for your reward in heaven will be great."

It is to be remembered, that the doctrines of which I have spoken are not truths occasionally adverted to by Jesus Christ, as something not essential to his main purpose. They constitute his religion. They are the doctrines which he came to teach. They are the doctrines to which everything else in his preaching is related, and on which everything depends. He came to reform men, to reconcile them to God, to establish the reign of Heaven; and these purposes were to be effected by making known to them the true character of God, their relations to Him, and their own nature and destination. These doctrines are the great light which rose upon the nations that were in darkness. He discovered God to men,

and made known to them that they were immortal.

In order to have a just conception of the force of the argument to be derived from these sublime doctrines, we ought to compare them with those which philosophy had attained before. There is no heathen teacher who in wisdom and virtue claims a higher rank than Socrates,—none between whom and Jesus Christ a parallel may be instituted more fairly. His life forms an era in the history of human improvement. In the record of his discourses and instructions preserved by Xenophon, we find much correct, and some false morality; the whole founded, however, not on very comprehensive principles, but on a wise observation of human nature and human life as they lay before him. There are many excellent rules of prudence, and some high and generous sentiments. There are views of the character of *the gods*, which would be imperfectly true if applied to the one God; but there is nothing in this work of his very intelligent disciple, which affords an intimation that Socrates was not a polytheist. From the writings of Plato, it may be inferred that his master or himself had a conception of one Supreme Being;

but amid the obscurity and the extravagant imaginations of that Dialogue in which this conception is particularly developed, it is impossible to discern any definite representation of the Divinity corresponding to what is so clearly presented in the Gospels. The morality of Socrates, as far as it appears in the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon, is based on the relations of man in the present life, and not at all upon the relations of man to eternity. It is true that in the writings of Plato, and especially in that beautiful Dialogue which contains the discourse of Socrates on the day of his death, he is represented as believing and teaching the immortality of the soul. In that Dialogue there is a passage which stands out a brightly illuminated point above the common level of heathen philosophy. It is a distinct and eloquent recognition of the sanctions of the future life as considerations of the highest importance to govern our conduct in the present. It might have been written by a Christian; but in the writings of a Christian it would be passed over without particular notice. That Socrates should afterward speak doubtfully of the doctrines which he had maintained, is not, perhaps, strange. But it is with strong feelings of surprise and disappointment

that we become convinced that the immortality which he taught was an immortality without continued consciousness; an immortality of the soul, but not of the individual; an immortality in which the spiritual part was to pass through successive changes, losing at each transition the memory of its former state.* After this, it is not matter of much wonder, that the whole should appear to have been rather a delightful poetic vision, than a sober and practical speculation. Nor is it surprising to find, when Plato is with difficulty, and, it may be thought, without success, endeavoring to prove that a man should retain his integrity, to whatever evils it may expose him, that he makes no reference to the future life; that he does not think of saying, with Jesus Christ, "For your reward in heaven will be great."

The speculations of Plato seem often rather a play of the imagination than an exercise of the understanding, and have often probably but a remote relation to the practical philosophy of his master. In his Dialogues, Socrates is introduced, like the other speakers, as a dramatic personage.

* [The passage of Plato here referred to (*Phædo*, cc. 129, 130, p. 107, C.) is quoted, with remarks, in the *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, Vol. III. pp. 111–113, note.]

Of the real discourses of that philosopher, those discourses which took such strong hold on the minds of men, we have, I conceive, a fair specimen in the Memorabilia, perhaps the most remarkable book which has come down to us from heathen antiquity. In its form and purpose it bears no inconsiderable resemblance to the Gospels. In the latter, however, we have the doctrines and instructions of Christ recorded by four unlettered men ; while in the former we have those of Socrates preserved by a philosopher, writing with Attic elegance. We may, then, institute a comparison between them. The Memorabilia contains many correct views of the relations of man to man, some notices of the supposed goodness and wisdom of imagined superior powers, and just directions for attaining our true dignity and happiness, men being regarded only as beings of this world, but still as moral and intellectual beings. Turn now to the Gospels, and consider the doctrines which are there displayed. Forget, as far as you can, all those conceptions with which you have been familiar from childhood, and which you have received directly or indirectly from these very works. Come to their study in the state of mind which you may suppose to have been that of an enlightened Hea-

then who should in any way have become convinced of their truth; and thus lay yourself open, as far as you are able, to a full impression of the overpowering sublimity of the truths which they contain. In reading the work of Xenophon, our state of mind may resemble that of one passing through a pleasant and well-cultivated country, who sees everywhere proofs of convenience and comfort and human ingenuity. In the study of the Gospels, if we do indeed fully comprehend and feel the doctrines which were taught by Christ, our emotions will be like those of a traveller placed where the eternal objects of nature rise around him in their grandeur and awfulness, from whose view the works of man with all their littleness have disappeared, and upon whom the feeling comes that he is alone with God.

LET us now consider what there is characteristic in the moral principles which Jesus Christ is represented by the Evangelists as having inculcated, and which all the doctrines and sanctions of his religion are intended to support and enforce. The morality which he taught is the most pure and comprehensive. It was taught to a world lying in

ignorance and wickedness; and it coincides with the last results of the most enlightened philosophy. It was taught eighteen hundred years ago; yet so extensive are its requirements, that they are still but imperfectly comprehended by many of Christ's disciples. I do not say that they are imperfectly obeyed,—this would be universally true,—but that there are many by whom they are but partially understood. This is not because they are expressed obscurely, or because they breathe any spirit of fanaticism, or require any course of conduct opposed to nature and reason. It is because there are many who do not understand their own nature, their true interest, and their relations to their fellow-creatures.

We render to every man his due; we violate no man's rights; there is no one who can complain that we have injured him; we have broken no one of the commandments. All this is very well; and we fancy, perhaps, that we have fulfilled our obligations. But if this be the whole of our goodness, we are yet very far from the virtue required by Jesus Christ. We do no evil;—we are required to exert ourselves habitually to do good. There is a demand upon us for the most disinterested and the most active benevolence. He who

would be a disciple of Christ must acquire the virtue of Christian charity. He must blend and lose his individual interests in those of his family, his friends, his country, and mankind. It is the business of a Christian to render services to his fellow-men. "Let him who would be great among you minister to you, and let him who would be chief among you be your servant." What ministry and what services are required appears from the example proposed for imitation in the words which follow: "Even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life to ransom many." "Do good and lend, hoping for nothing in return." "Do to others whatever you would that they should do to you." "I was hungry, and you gave me food; thirsty, and you gave me drink; a stranger, and you received me into your houses; naked, and you clothed me; sick, and you took care of me; in prison, and you came to me. . . . In doing so to one of the humblest of these my brothers, you did so to me."

But what are the limits of this charity, as it was inculcated by Jesus Christ? It has none. It must form itself upon the model of the infinite goodness of the common Father. It must triumph over inveterate prejudices and bitter hostil-

ity; — the Samaritan is the neighbor of the Jew. It must forget insult and persecution and cruelty; and when the occasion of rendering good for evil has come, it must regard an enemy merely as an erring and unhappy fellow-creature, for whose benefit and improvement it is our duty to labor. “ You have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless them who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who harass and persecute you; that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he causes his sun to rise on the bad and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” The production of happiness is the only ultimate end of the operations of God; and if we would secure his favor, and attain the perfection of our nature, we must be fellow-workers with God.

One can scarcely avoid feeling some reluctance to state the extent of these requirements, when he looks around, and sees how imperfectly they have been obeyed; how imperfectly they are obeyed; how many seem scarcely to have a notion of their existence, and how many there are who look with a sort of compassionate or contemptuous superior-

ity upon all conduct which cannot be resolved into prudent selfishness,—satisfied with their own sagacity, proud of their success, and regarding “the wisdom which is from above” only as the notion of men weak, enthusiastic, and ignorant of the world.

Compare the precepts of Jesus Christ with the moral principles, and, if you are willing to go still further, with the moral practice of the age in which they were delivered ; compare his code of duty with the conceptions which men have derived from their natural sentiments operated upon by the circumstances common to us all ; and it will be perceived that it is indeed a wonderful system of morals. It coincides, as I have said, with the last results of enlightened philosophy ; but it is because philosophy has been enlightened and guided by these very precepts inculcated in the Gospels. How does it happen,—for this, it must be recollected, is the question before us,—how does it happen that these precepts are found in the Gospels ? How was it that the writers of these books formed a conception of such a teacher as they have described ?

CHAPTER III.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST AS IT APPEARS IN THE GOSPELS.

(CONTINUED.)

SECTION II.

His Personal Character.

IN the conception of a divine teacher, much more is required than that his doctrines and instructions should be worthy of God; and, conformably to this remark, the personal character which in the Gospels is ascribed to Jesus Christ is most striking and original. At the same time, there is such an air of truth in these writings, that, whatever may be any one's doubts or opinions, he can hardly read them attentively without a strong feeling that he is reading a narrative of real events, and without conceiving of the character of Christ as one which actually existed. He is represented as not only destitute of all advantages of rank or station, but, still more, as placed in circumstances

which might expose him to contempt and derision ; yet he constantly appears as maintaining an immeasurable superiority over all other men, by the moral force and dignity of his character. Everything in his words and actions is just to the original conception. He makes claim to the highest authority, calmly, without effort or exaggeration. He announces himself as connected with God in a manner in which no other human being ever was ; but he is able to support himself on the elevation which he assumes. There is no taint of human weakness, of vanity or arrogance, in his declarations or actions. On the contrary, he regards nothing as humiliating, but what in truth is so. He converses with tax-gatherers and sinners, because his office was to call sinners to reformation. He is content to be surrounded with a company of poor, ignorant Apostles ; but they had, or might be formed to have, the moral qualities required in the future ministers of his religion. He travels about in poverty, having no habitation of his own "where to lay his head." He does it, because it was required by the nature of those duties which he had to perform ; and especially in order that, by the example of his own poverty, he might destroy in the most effectual manner all

worldly expectations in those who were disposed to join him. He washes the feet of his disciples. There may be abundant ostentation in pretended humility, but there is none here; his object was to give his disciples a lesson which it is evident they needed. In all his actions there is a composed, unaffected dignity; a steady regard to the high purposes of his mission; a perfect correspondence between his conduct and his claims. This character is particularly discovered in the exercise of his supernatural powers. He performs the most astonishing miracles, but there is nothing of theatrical display. "He was loved by the Father, and the Father had shown him how to do what he himself does." He appears like one of whom this declaration is true; like one too highly favored by God to be affected by the admiration and astonishment of men.

I WILL not here repeat what I have had occasion to remark before on the distinctive character of his miracles; but it is proper to observe, that if we suppose no miracles to have been performed, and the narratives of them to be consequently a work of imagination, then the difficult question arises, how it happened that the writers of the Gos-

pels conceived with such truth the character which the miracles of a messenger from God ought to have, when all other narrators of fictitious miracles have failed so glaringly in every similar attempt.

BUT in the wonderful history contained in the Gospels there are other traits as striking as those which I have mentioned. Consider, for instance, the whole character of Christ's discourses in reference to that object, which, from the nature of the case, he must have had first in view, the gaining of followers and disciples. He uses no arts of seduction. He takes no advantage of the prejudices or passions of those about him. In so far as they were mischievous and evil, he makes no compromise with them. He meets and opposes the darling hopes, the cherished selfishness, and the inveterate and consecrated errors of his countrymen, with a tone of authority the most direct and absolute. He speaks to his hearers, in the plainest language, of the hypocrisy and of the vices of those whom they had been accustomed to reverence for their reputed sanctity, and to regard as leaders and examples. He admits but one claim, and demands but one requisite, to his favor, —a sincere purpose of obedience to God. He repels

from him those who come with any worldly views. There can be nothing more decisive than the language in which he annihilates all earthly expectations, and presents to his disciples a distinct image of the life of suffering and danger on which they were about to enter. “They will revile you, they will persecute you; they will speak all evil against you, falsely, for my sake”; “they will scourge you in their synagogues”; “brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child. . . . You will be hated by all men for my sake.” “He who kills you will think that he is offering a sacrifice to God.”

What shall we say to the conception of a teacher, who is represented as making such predictions to his disciples? Is it drawn from reality? or are we indebted to the genius of certain unknown writers for this extraordinary delineation?

Let us attend to another example of his mode of addressing those who came to him: “Let him who would be my follower renounce himself, and come after me, bearing his cross.” The Common Version, in rendering “deny himself,” expresses nothing like the force of the original, which implies a total putting off of all selfish affections.

We are familiar with the figure of “taking up the cross,” and the figurative meaning of these words is, for the most part, the only one which presents itself to our minds. We can hardly feel the impression which it must have made upon those to whom the horrible torture of crucifixion, as inflicted upon the most wretched outcasts of society, was not an uncommon spectacle. He who was to suffer this dreadful death was compelled to bear his cross to the place of execution. It is to this that Christ alludes. No form of words could represent to his followers with more fearful distinctness, that they were to prepare themselves for torture and death.

If it be allowed that these predictions and declarations were really uttered by Jesus Christ, it must be admitted, I think, that he could have gained no proselytes to a life of severe privation and suffering, few converts to the endurance of insults, stripes, and rancorous persecution, except by the most satisfactory evidence that he had something to promise as a compensation, or, in other words, by the clearest and most irresistible proofs of his divine mission and authority. But if it be admitted that he gave such proofs, we arrive at once at the conclusion which we wish to

reach; for there will then be no reason to doubt, that the whole representation of him given in the Gospels is drawn from reality. If it be said, on the other hand, that these words were not uttered by Christ, but were put into his mouth by the writers of these histories, still it must be conceded that they correspond with admirable truth to the original conception of him as a messenger from God. He appears as he ought; clearly announcing to his disciples what they must prepare themselves to suffer; furnishing them, indeed, with the strongest motives to endurance, but motives which touched upon nothing earthly; and preparing them for that hard warfare, in which they were to be the victims, against the vices and passions of men, against obstinate superstition and malignant bigotry. It is to be recollected, likewise, that he speaks, with this severe calmness, of suffering which pressed equally upon himself and upon his disciples. It was for *his* sake that they would be hated. The conception of him is perfectly just, and in such a case as the present, this is saying very much; but it is not saying all that we ought. It exhibits a simple and awful composure of mind, compared with which all the poetical representations of Roman stoicism appear

like mere displays for the theatre. The conception of Jesus Christ calling all men to come to him, and at the same time thus distinctly forewarning them of the earthly fate which awaited equally his followers and himself, if it be not derived from reality, implies a boldness and originality of imagination of which there is no other example.

It is as a messenger of God, that Jesus Christ is exhibited in the Gospels; and his conduct and discourses during the time of his ministry principally have relation to his office. He seldom appears as acting in the common relations of man to man, or under circumstances very analogous to those in which other men may be placed. Comparatively speaking, we see but little of his private character (to use these words in their strictest sense) till the closing scenes of his life, when it breaks forth with unspeakable splendor. Wherever it elsewhere appears, it corresponds to that moral perfection which he manifested in the execution of his peculiar office. In relation to this subject, as well as to others of which I have spoken, there are passages which, as they stand in the Common Version, require explanation, though,

even if left unexplained, they may not essentially affect our conclusions. But, in regard to the character of Christ, I will here notice one or two concerning which I think the most difficulty may be felt.

At the marriage feast at Cana, when the mother of Jesus informs him that the wine is spent, there seems something harsh in his reply: “Woman, what have you to do with me?* My hour has not yet come.” But it may be observed, in the first place, that the forms of courtesy, being arbitrary, vary at different times, and in different countries; and that to address one by the appellation of *Woman* was not considered disrespectful by the ancients.† By the words, “What have you to do with me?” our Saviour undoubtedly intended to repress all interference of his mother with the exercise of his miraculous powers. Our conceptions of her are principally formed from the beautiful fictions of poetry and painting, in which

“holiest Mary bends
In virgin beauty o'er her blessed babe.”

* Or, “why do you trouble me?”—It is thus that the words should be rendered, not, as in the Common Version, “What have I to do with thee?”

† [See John xix. 26.]

There is, indeed, no reason to doubt the real excellence of her character; but there is as little doubt, that she entertained the common belief of her countrymen respecting a Messiah who was to be the greatest of princes, far more glorious than his ancestor David. With this belief, trusting that her son was the Messiah, it was scarcely possible that she should not entertain hopes and feelings very inconsistent with what was really to be his fate and her own. The mother of the prince of Israel and of the world must have looked forward to something very different from a life of obscurity and suffering. Moreover, it was not in human nature that she should not have had some disposition to exert over her son the authority and influence of a mother. But, in the exercise of his office as the minister of God, it was impossible for him to yield to any human direction. The narrative we are considering implies that she wished him, on the occasion recorded, to make some display of his supernatural powers, or, at least, in some way to manifest himself as the Messiah; and it implies also that she had previously urged him to do so. Without the last supposition, we cannot account for our Saviour's putting the sense which he obviously did upon the very slight intimation of his

mother; nor for her subsequent direction to the servants soon after the discouragement she had received. It was to repress those feelings and dispositions of his mother which I have just described, feelings and dispositions which could only serve to aggravate her future sufferings, that our Saviour made the answer recorded. It was repelling, but it was intended to save her some of the anguish of disappointment; and the nature of his office rendered it necessary to repress all interference on her part. He was compelled to separate himself in some degree from her, both for her own sake, and because his duties were such as did not admit of his receiving her counsel, or being affected by her influence. He had, probably, announced to her before, that his ministry would be exercised in poverty and suffering, and terminated in a short time by a cruel death; and she, like his disciples at a subsequent period, had been unable to conform her mind to the comprehension and belief of what was so utterly foreign to all her previous conceptions respecting the Messiah. It is to his last sufferings that he alludes in the words, "My hour has not yet come."* His purpose in these

* The reasons for understanding these words in the sense above assigned are, first, that the expression is elsewhere in St. John's Gospel

words I conceive to have been to bring forcibly home to the mind of his mother what he had before declared to her respecting the intimate connection between his office and his death; and the brief interval which was to intervene between his assuming the former, and his submitting to the latter. Their force is this: "Why do you urge me to manifest myself as the Messiah? The hour for my last sufferings has not yet come."

Having, however, repressed the interference of his mother, it seems to have been partly in compliance with her wishes that he performed a miracle on this occasion. The miracle itself has been objected to, as giving encouragement to intemperance. This charge, however, it must, I think, be allowed, is very inconsistent with the whole character and life of Christ. It is not likely that there was any excess at an entertainment where the wine was deficient through the poverty of the host, as appears to have been the case in the present in-

used in this sense, as in ch. vii. 30 (and so viii. 20), "No one laid hands on him, for his hour had not yet come";—xiii. 1, "But Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father";—xvii. 1, "Father, the hour has come":—and, secondly, because this sense suits with the connection and circumstances of the case, which no other that has been proposed seems to me to do.

stance. When the master of the feast says, "Men commonly produce their good wine first, and, when the guests have drunk freely,* then that which is poorer," he merely mentions a common custom, from which nothing can be inferred respecting the temperance of the guests on the present occasion, or indeed on any other to which his remark might apply, except that it seems a rule rather adapted to check than to promote excess. Intoxication is not a vice to which inhabitants of a warm climate are disposed. The wine used at this time was probably drunk with the meal, rather than subsequent to it; and we must not transfer to the feast of a poor family in Galilee notions derived from the luxurious entertainments of ancient or modern times. Especially we must recollect, that an evident miracle was the least likely of all events to promote thoughtless and improper indulgence.

OUR Saviour's treatment of the Syro-Phœnician woman who besought him to cure her daughter, also requires some explanation.† It is to be recol-

* Thus the word in the original is to be understood, in the connection in which it stands. In its primary, etymological sense, it means nothing more than "to drink wine," being derived from *μεθω*, "wine."

† See Matthew xv. 21–29; Mark vii. 24–31.

lected, that his disciples at this time shared in the common narrow prejudices of the Jews in respect to other nations. They would have been dissatisfied, their feelings would have revolted, if their Master, the Jewish Messiah, had at once performed a miracle for the benefit of a Heathen. By his delay, by suffering her to importune him without an answer, their natural feelings of humanity were left to operate in her favor. They themselves at last take her part, and ask him to "send her away satisfied"; for their words may express this meaning; and that this was in fact their meaning appears from the reply of Christ. By what he further said, he gave her an opportunity of showing herself, not merely an object of compassion, but of approbation. He thus afforded her a new source of gratification, and the incident at the same time tended still further to enlarge the feelings of his disciples. The interest which they took in her case, and the praise of her which their Master expressed, must have served to break down their illiberal prejudices. It is be observed, likewise, that the words of Christ have a different effect in the original from what they have as rendered in the Common Version,— "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." The

last word, in the original, is a diminutive,—one of that class of diminutives which is commonly used in expressions of familiarity or endearment. It properly denotes those little dogs which were kept as playthings. It is evident what a different air is given to the whole speech by this circumstance.

THE miraculous cure of the Gadarene dæmoniacs was accompanied by the destruction of a herd of swine; which was of course a considerable loss to the owner.* The miracle forms in this respect an exception to the common, purely beneficent character of the miracles ascribed to Christ. I am inclined to think that there was some evident, specific reason for the infliction of this loss, which does not appear in the narrative. The flesh of swine was a food prohibited by the Jewish Law, and if the owner, as seems most probable, was a Jew, he manifested in keeping them a disregard to the precepts of his religion. We are not obliged, however, to have recourse to any explanation of this sort. It is only necessary to recur to general principles. A miracle is, properly speak-

* See Matthew viii. 28–34; Mark v. 1–20; Luke viii. 26–39.

ing, an act of God. The human agent to whom we may refer it is merely an ostensible agent, and is to be regarded solely as the minister of God. But of the acts of God we must judge upon very different principles from those which we apply to the acts of men. When, in the common course of his providence, he deprives us of our possessions, we believe that he does it in infinite wisdom and goodness. It is equally consistent with his wisdom and goodness, that he should do the same by a miracle. The circumstance that the act is miraculous does not in any degree affect its character in other respects. In the exercise of perfect rectitude and benevolence, God may do, and is continually doing, what it would be most unjust and injurious for one human being to do to another. Now it is not the act of a human being, but the act of God, which we are considering. It was not Christ, but God, who inflicted this loss; and, viewed in this light, all inquiry respecting the particular cause why it was inflicted, and all discussion of its reason or justice in reference to the owner, are as much out of place as they would be concerning a fire, or a shipwreck, or an earthquake. But, putting the question respecting the loss of the owner out of view, there is a reason which may be as-

signed for the destruction of the animals. It served at once to render the reality of the miracle evident and indisputable, and to give it greater notoriety. It does not appear that Christ was at any subsequent period in the country of the Gadarenes; his present visit was very short, and it was desirable, therefore, to produce at once a strong impression, and to excite general attention to his ministry. The miracle was of a nature particularly adapted to effect these purposes. That these purposes were intended may appear from the direction of Christ to the person whom he had cured, whom he would not suffer to accompany him; but whom, contrary to his usual practice, he directed to return, and to publish what great things had been done for him.

WITH one exception, which I shall notice immediately, I have now mentioned all those passages concerning which I have at any time felt the most difficulty myself. But these passages are to be viewed under another aspect than that in which we have hitherto regarded them. They serve essentially to strengthen our present argument. They are among those striking and decisive proofs, which the Gospels everywhere furnish,

of the fact that their writers had no purpose of deceiving by the display of an imaginary character. It is evident that they had no powers and no habits of mind which would lead them to attempt, or which would enable them, if they did attempt, to produce an effect upon the minds of men by a correct and striking exhibition of beautiful imaginations and ideas of their own, well disposed and fitted to each other. But it is, perhaps, even more evident that they had no purpose of this sort ; for, with this purpose, they would never have inserted narratives like those on which we have been commenting, which present at first view such difficulties, and are so liable to objection. They could have had no motive for inserting them but the truth. So far from accommodating their narrative to any abstract conception of what a divine teacher ought to be, they seem never to have formed an abstract conception of what the character of Christ really was. They give no summary view of it; they do not attempt to generalize their observations in a single instance. They afford us no knowledge of it except by their very brief accounts of what he did and what he said, and of what was done and said by others in relation to him. In these accounts their style is inartificial and defective.

They write like uneducated men, to whom composition is an unusual and difficult effort, and who, on account of the labor of writing, express themselves but imperfectly, omit all that is not essential, and leave much unexplained that requires explanation. Acquainted with all the particular circumstances of each event which they relate, they seem never to have placed themselves in the situation of readers to whom these circumstances might not be known, nor to have considered how the narrative might appear to them, or what difficulties and objections might arise in their minds. There are the most evident marks of the absence of all contrivance and all aim at effect. They give no explanations, except a very few quite unimportant. They scarcely make any comments, or point out anything to the observation of the reader. No composition was ever more inertificially put together than their histories. They seem never to have had a thought of making one thing so bear upon and illustrate another as to produce a harmonious whole. When we find, therefore, that from their entire narratives, viewed either separately or together, there results a most wonderful, original, and consistent exhibition of character, it is impossible to ascribe this to any other cause than that they drew from reality.

There is, without doubt, an air of perfect simplicity and truth, which gives a charm to these writings, in the absence of all the common excellences of composition. But the character which belongs to them is not, perhaps, that which we might at first view expect or desire. We may be tempted to wish that the life and doctrines of Jesus Christ had been described and explained by such writers as Xenophon and Plato. But the wise providence of God has ordered it otherwise ; and has so ordered it, that the records of our religion carry with them independent evidence of their own authenticity. We are compelled to believe that what the Evangelists have told us is true, because their very writings afford satisfactory proof that they had no ability to conceive and describe what they have told us, if it had not been true. The genius of Xenophon might have enabled him to imagine and delineate the character which he has ascribed to Socrates ; and there is nothing in the discourses of his master which transcends the powers of the disciple. In believing his account, therefore, we have to rely upon his veracity, for which we think we have sufficient evidence, and which we find confirmed by some collateral testimony. But as regards the writers of the Gospels,

we have not only other and much stronger proof of their veracity, but we have, still further, proof of their entire inability to have conceived and exhibited the character and discourses of Christ by any effort of their own power. They must be simple historians, because the splendid fiction which we have otherwise to suppose, if it lies within the possible limits of human genius, was very far removed from the sphere of their minds.

I HAVE referred to one other passage beside those which I have noticed, as seeming to me to present a difficulty. It is the cry of our Saviour on the cross, which is rendered in the Common Version, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* These words may appear, at first sight, to be a mere exclamation, forced from him by the extremity of torture, and having something of the character of impatience and complaint. If this were so, all that could be said would be, that his strength failed for a moment under the most excruciating sufferings. But I am, for various reasons, persuaded that the words uttered by Christ are not to be so considered. In the first place,

* Matthew xxvii. 46; Mark xv. 34.

such an expression is inconsistent with his character as it always appears elsewhere, and particularly with those striking proofs of fortitude and self-possession which he really exhibited during his last sufferings. In the next place, it seems to me repugnant to the strongest principles of human nature, that he should have uttered these words in the sense supposed. His cross was surrounded by enemies, reviling and insulting him, and taunting him with being abandoned by God. Supposing his self-command not to have been entirely broken down, it must have been abhorrent to every feeling and to every motive which might act upon his mind for him to heighten their triumph and to harden them in their guilt, by proclaiming with a loud voice a sense of his being forsaken by God. But, in the last place, I think the words admit of a very different explanation, suited to his character and to the circumstances in which they were uttered. We may first observe, then, that the word "forsaken," which stands in the Common Version and in all the other principal English translations into which I have looked, does not correspond to the original word. It has an associated, secondary meaning, which that word, as I conceive, is not intended to express. "To forsake" a person

means, not simply to leave him, but to leave him through indifference or dislike, or from the operation of some selfish feeling, as fear of common danger; but the term in the original has not necessarily this meaning. The words of Christ, therefore, should be rendered without conveying this associated idea: "My God! my God! why hast thou left me?" These are the first words of the twenty-second Psalm; and we must here recollect several circumstances which may not at once occur to the mind. First, David was regarded by the Jews with the highest veneration. He was considered as a type of the Messiah; and many of his Psalms were viewed by them as applicable to himself; indeed, in their primary sense, but, in their secondary and higher sense, as prophetic of the Messiah. Secondly, the Jews were so familiar with their Scriptures, and especially with the Psalms, that the quotation of a small portion of a passage was sufficient to remind them of the remainder. The first verse of a Psalm would bring the whole to their recollection. Thirdly, they were strongly disposed to consider temporal prosperity and affliction as proofs of the favor and of the displeasure of God. The very circumstance that Christ was suffering

so ignominious and cruel a death was, in their state of feeling towards him, sufficient proof to them that he was an object of God's wrath. Even the faith of most of his disciples was, there is no doubt, prostrated, at least for a season, by thus seeing their Messiah expiring in torture amid the triumph of his enemies. A crucified Messiah! There was no conception at which a Jew would have revolted with greater horror.

This being the state of mind of those by whom his cross was surrounded, our Saviour called out with a loud voice, "My God! my God! why hast thou left me?" What would be the natural effect of this exclamation upon the multitude? It at once brought to their minds the whole Psalm, many parts of which were so strikingly applicable to the sufferer before them. They would understand him as applying these passages to himself. Yet this Psalm they believed to have been written by David, and that monarch was the type of the Messiah. Was it so certain, then, that he who could adopt and apply to himself the words of David was an object of God's displeasure? Was it certain that he was not the Messiah? Why did his sufferings, any more than the sufferings of David, prove him to be an outcast from God?

But the words themselves are the language of strong habitual trust in the favor of God. This feeling is expressed in the repetition of the address, "*My God, my God.*" Imagine a sinner, a malefactor, such as the Jews believed our Saviour to be, thus addressing the Almighty, and you cannot but be struck with the entire inconsistency of the address with such a character. "Why hast thou left me?" That is, Why hast thou left me to suffer? The form of expostulation is to be referred to the bold and passionate style of the East, and the simple meaning is nothing more than what we should express in colder language by saying, "It is through thy appointment, O God, that I suffer." In using the words which he did, our Saviour adopted the language of David for the purpose of bringing the whole Psalm from which he quoted to the minds of those who heard him. In this Psalm there are strong expressions of confidence in God, and the words themselves, which he uttered so that all around him might hear, were meant, not to express a sense of his being forsaken, but to convey to them the sentiment of his habitual trust in God, and his knowledge that his sufferings were by God's appointment. Such, I believe, would be the natural effect of his

words; what I have stated being their true sense. An address to God like that made by Christ would be wholly incongruous in the mouth of a person who did not feel that he was habitually an object of God's peculiar care and favor. The very form of expostulation marks its character in this respect more strongly. The words were uttered by Christ, like his prayer on another occasion, "for the sake of the people who stood by, that they might believe that God had sent him." Just before expiring he thus professed, for the last time, what he had in his ministry such frequent occasion to profess, his confidence in God, and his reference of all his actions and sufferings to Him.

APPENDIX.

25*

A P P E N D I X.

ON THE ADAPTATION OF THE DISCOURSES OF CHRIST
TO THE CHARACTER AND CONDITION OF THE JEWS,
AND TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH HE WAS
PLACED.

A CONSIDERATION of the character and condition of the people to whom our Lord was sent, and of the circumstances in which he was placed, is necessary to the formation of correct views respecting the design and the excellence of his discourses as a teacher of religion and morality. His teachings will excite much stronger admiration when we consider them in these relations, than when we regard them merely in the abstract, as general commendations or precepts of virtue and piety. In the former case, we shall perceive not merely their intrinsic excellence, but also their excellence of propriety and adaptation. We shall perceive why some virtues were particularly selected and

insisted upon ; and the character, the feelings, and the purposes of our Saviour will appear in bolder relief and more striking colors, when contrasted with those of the persons whom he was addressing. I propose, therefore, to give a sketch of the character and condition of the Jewish people at the time when our Saviour commenced his ministry, and to illustrate what I have been saying by pointing out the reference which he had to their feelings and expectations in those declarations, commonly called *the Beatitudes*, with which he began his public instructions.

THE Jews had been separated by God from the rest of mankind, and had received a religion from him, the foundation of which was a knowledge of his existence, his unity, and his supremacy. They had not been made acquainted with a future state of retribution by direct and express revelation. In the time of our Saviour their notions of religion were very imperfect and erroneous. This was the case even in respect to the character of God, though they were especially proud of the distinction of being the only people to whom God was known. The representations of him by the Jewish Rabbis, and their stories concerning him, as they have come

down to us, are extremely low and unworthy. Many of them are such as could never have been tolerated by men who had any just conceptions of the Almighty. In respect to his power and dominion, they considered him as the God of the world; but in all other respects they seem to have viewed him as their national god. They appear, generally speaking, to have had no belief that his care and goodness extended beyond themselves, and that his favor toward men was regulated only by a consideration of their moral desert. They seem never to have conceived of him as the common Father of mankind. Scarcely anything in Christianity appears to have given them more offence, than its being a revelation of his impartial goodness,—its representing the Gentiles as equally with themselves the objects of his care, and equally capable with themselves of obtaining his favor.

As to the doctrine of a future life, it was rejected, as is well known, by the Sadducees, a sect which comprehended the principal part of the more opulent and noble among the Jews. The Pharisees, however, who were the leaders of the common people in their religious opinions, believed in a future state of retribution, on which men were to enter immediately after death. It is

not easy to ascertain their precise opinions respecting this subject; but there is no doubt that they were essentially different from those of an enlightened Christian. They probably believed in the doctrine of transmigration.

The notions of the majority of the Jews concerning moral and religious excellence were extremely incorrect. What they were appears from the character of the Pharisees; for the Pharisees were commonly regarded as their most holy men. The nation in general, in the time of our Saviour, was infected with the universal corruption of the age. Their wickedness, at a somewhat later period, is described in the very strongest language by their own historian, Josephus. In the times, however, which immediately preceded the coming of our Saviour, I believe that a large proportion of all the virtue and religion which existed in the world was to be found in Judæa. Certainly there was then quite as much at Jerusalem as could have been discovered at Rome under the reign of Tiberius.

In regard to the political condition of the Jews in the time of our Saviour's ministry, they were subject to the power of the Romans; Judæa had been converted into a Roman province, and its in-

habitants were compelled to pay tribute. They endured, in common with the other nations subject to Rome, the misery of one of those provincial governments, which, for the most part, were active and vigilant in nothing but oppression and rapacity. There were, however, peculiar aggravations of the hardship of their condition. They regarded themselves as the sole favorites of Heaven, and as a people far superior to the rest of mankind, whom they spoke of as "dogs" and "sinners," and hated with a religious hatred. The hatred which they felt toward other nations was returned with a full measure of contempt and aversion. We scarcely find a mention of them in any heathen author which is not accompanied with some expression of these feelings. In being subject to heathen masters, therefore, they were exposed to peculiar sufferings from insults offered to their religion, and from ridicule cast upon their pretensions. Such servitude they felt not merely as oppression, but as pollution; and, in respect to the Roman government, they hung upon the brink of rebellion, ready to receive an impulse from any hand.

They were, however, anxiously expecting a deliverer of no common character. Oppressed and afflicted, they were looking forward to the coming

of their Messiah, as the termination of their sufferings, and the commencement of glory and triumph. He was to be the dispenser of those high blessings which God had so long delayed; he was the hope of "all who were expecting deliverance in Jerusalem"; he was "to save his people," and "to restore the kingdom to Israel"; and his coming was to be attended with the most wonderful prodigies, and the most extraordinary revolutions. The kingdom which the great body of the Jews expected, "the kingdom of God," "the kingdom of Heaven," "the kingdom of the Messiah," was not such a kingdom as we Christians understand to be expressed by those words. It was a temporal kingdom, to be founded on conquest. Their Messiah was to be a prince and a warrior, not merely to deliver them from subjection to the Romans, but to make them masters of the world. He was to come "with garments rolled in blood," "to tread the wine-press alone, to tread the nations in his anger, and to trample them in his fury." The descendant of David was to darken the glory of his ancestors with the new splendor which he would cast around their throne. He was to establish his residence at Jerusalem, and that city was to be the metropolis of the world.

It was among this people, thus oppressed and afflicted, and thus anxiously waiting for a deliverer, that John the Baptist appeared to announce that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand. The expected time was at last arriving. He performed no miracles to confirm his declaration ; and yet it is not wonderful that multitudes flocked to him, whose numbers are thus expressed by the Evangelist, in the style of Eastern hyperbole : " Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judæa and all the country about the Jordan." The people were not surprised, perhaps, at his preaching of reformation, for they might think that some change and reformation of character were necessary to prepare them for the reception of their Messiah. But the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees felt, without doubt, no less wonder than exasperation at the language of severe rebuke in which he addressed them. His preaching must have roused the people, and tended to produce in them a disposition to commence resistance to the tyranny which they hoped soon to overturn. The exciting character of the preaching of John, and the fear of popular commotions in consequence of it, were probably among the principal causes, as they are stated to have been by Josephus, of his being cast into

prison by Herod Antipas, and of his being put to death. It is not unlikely that the immediate occasion of his death according to the account of the Evangelists was only a concerted artifice, by which Herod meant to screen himself from some of the odium of the action, and to assume the appearance of doing it reluctantly.

Before his death, however, the Baptist had fulfilled his office, and pointed out the founder of the kingdom which he had announced. This was a young man of Galilee, a provincial part of Judæa,—a citizen of Nazareth, a town proverbially despised,—the reputed son of a carpenter. We may conceive of him as appearing in the simple dress of a Jewish peasant, the same, probably, as is still worn in that part of the East where he was born. We may represent him to ourselves with that expression of countenance, and that air and manner, which must have been produced by the consciousness that he came into the world as the chosen messenger of God, under his immediate and sensible direction, with but a single purpose to accomplish, and that purpose high, solemn, and important beyond all example. He must have had an habitual seriousness and intentness of mind, and perhaps something of melancholy in his appearance, for

there was always distinctly in his view a short life of toil and suffering and opposition, to be terminated by a death the most cruel and ignominious. He must have had an air of abstraction and disengagement from the world, the appearance of a being who had come here only on some purpose of mercy. For he was separated and set apart from mankind, he was in a great measure cut off from human sympathy and support, by the sublime peculiarity of his office, by his moral and intellectual superiority, and by the absence of personal interest in the common pursuits of men. In his expressions of benevolence and friendship, there must have been that gentleness and mildness which are produced by freedom from all vulgar feelings and selfish affections, something of the compassion of a superior intelligence mingling with the kindness of a friend,—a manner of which perhaps we may see a resemblance in the best of men, when their minds are softened by sorrow and raised above the world by religion.

He commenced his ministry in Galilee, without at first declaring its full purpose, because this accorded so little with the expectations of the Jews that it could not have been at once made known, without exciting passions by which his ministry

would have been immediately interrupted. He only announced, as John the Baptist had done, that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand, and performed miracles in proof of his being the minister of God, without expressly declaring himself to be the Messiah. "And great multitudes followed him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judæa, and from the country beyond the Jordan." Having collected a few who joined themselves to him in a particular manner as his disciples, he ascended a mountain, or "*the mountain*," as it is expressed by the Evangelist,—that is, either Mount Tabor, or some other well-known mountain near Capernaum,—to deliver instruction to his followers. "And when he had sat down,"—the usual posture in which the Jewish doctors taught,—his disciples placed themselves near him, and the multitude by which he was attended gathered round.

If, then, there had been in all this multitude one man of high intellectual views and moral feelings,—one man among these Jews such as Plato was among the Heathens,—who had just notions of the impartial goodness of God and of the character to be expected in the Messiah, and who had been led to believe that Jesus was indeed this last

and greatest messenger from God, with what deep and anxious expectation must he have listened to the discourse now about to be delivered. "If he flatter the prejudices of this people," such an observer might have said to himself, "if he add excitement to their passions, if he urge them on to those objects which they now have full in view, if he propose himself as their leader, he is not the Messiah, he is not a messenger from God; his miracles are concerted frauds, or they are perhaps the work of evil dæmons." He would not have listened long, however, before all doubt and anxiety would have vanished from his mind. To this multitude of Jews, the obstinacy of whose pride no humiliations could subdue; who gloried in their knowledge of God, and regarded themselves as a holy people, the objects of his peculiar favor; who thanked God that they were not as other men, but that they were "Abraham's children," "Jews by birth, and not sinners of the Gentiles";—to this multitude the first address of Jesus Christ was, "Blessed are they who feel their spiritual wants, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."—They to whom he was speaking were full of the expectation of the highest temporal glory and prosperity about to flow in upon their nation, and were gen-

erally in the habit of regarding such prosperity as a pledge of the favor of God; but the enjoyment of this was not to be the lot of his disciples; and he proceeds, "Blessed are the mourners, for they will be comforted." — The Jews were full of deep resentments and angry passions; their hopes were fixed upon a Messiah who should be a warlike prince, who should inspire his followers with a martial spirit and heroic courage, and lead them under his banner to inflict vengeance upon their enemies and to subdue the world; and their Messiah had come at last to declare, "Blessed are the mild, for they will inherit the land." — In those whose minds had been already affected by the preaching of John the Baptist and of our Saviour, boundless desires of worldly pleasures had been excited, and had been made eager by what seemed the near prospect of their gratification. It was not with such desires, however, that the kingdom of Heaven was to be entered. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." — The Jews confined their humane feelings to those of their own nation, and were looking for their own glory to be accomplished amid the punishment and misery of the rest of mankind. "Blessed," says our Saviour, "are the compassion-

ate, for they will receive compassion." — They made merit to consist principally in the strict observance of ceremonies ordained by their Law or by their traditions, in the practice of austeries, in legal purity, and in frequent ablutions ; and the Pharisees taught that there was no guilt in desires, or even intentions, but in actions only. It was a very different morality that was taught by Jesus, a morality which flattered none of their prejudices or passions : "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." — They were ready to engage in rebellion, and were looking for wars of desolation and conquest. Jesus said to them, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be sons of God." — They did not perhaps suppose that the commencement of the reign of the Messiah would be free from difficulty and toil and suffering, either to himself or to his followers ; but they expected a full recompence upon earth. Nothing could be further from their thoughts than that his followers should spend their lives as preachers of a new religion, enduring continual persecution and suffering, and looking for their reward only beyond the grave ; or that their Messiah should begin his ministry with the declaration, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for

righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed will you be when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all evil against you, falsely, for my sake."

THE remainder of the discourse of our Saviour, like the part we have been considering, ought to be viewed in connection with the moral and intellectual state of those to whom it was addressed. When it is viewed in such a connection, we shall see at once that he by whom it was delivered was not an impostor, promoting and taking advantage of the prevalent notions respecting the Messiah and his kingdom, nor a fanatic borne away by the popular enthusiasm. He appears throughout patiently endeavoring to correct the errors of the multitude, to enlighten their understandings, to rectify their passions, to change the whole character of their feelings and motives. And who is this extraordinary teacher whose mind is of so much higher an order than the minds of all those by whom he is surrounded? If he be a mere human teacher, speaking from himself alone, he is nothing more than a peasant of Galilee, the son of a carpenter. But, though in the midst of men gross, sensual, uninformed, unprincipled, his morality is

the most pure, correct, and sublime; his views of duty are the most rational and comprehensive; not only does he transcend, beyond all comparison, the rulers and teachers of his own nation, but it is the highest praise of the best philosophers of ancient times, of Socrates and of Cicero, that their notions of religion and duty have some imperfect resemblance to those of Jesus of Nazareth. Let us examine his discourse. We shall discover no selfish purpose or object. He by whom it was delivered certainly had no design to take advantage of the passions and prejudices of his hearers in order to pass himself off for their Messiah. It is all in direct opposition to those passions and prejudices. Its object cannot be mistaken. It is not to make them subservient to any purpose of his own; it is only to make them wise and virtuous and holy. It is not to gain followers to himself; it is only to lead them back to their duty and to God. Is there any solution that will account for the appearance of a teacher so extraordinary in an obscure part of Judæa? There is one, and but one. He was what he claimed to be. He was a teacher commissioned and instructed by God.

THE END.

